

JOHN KAMPFNER ON WHAT WE MISS MOST ABOUT THE EU

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THE

RUSSIA

REPORT

HOW LABOUR
MUST HANDLE
BREXIT NOW
**BEN
BRADSHAW**

GERMANY'S
TOUGH CHOICE
ON CHINA
**CATHRIN
SCHAER**

AND WHAT IT

DOESN'T

TELL US..

BY JAMES BALL AND LIZ GERARD

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Six lines that just say it all

Andrew Adonis



The Russia report – finally out this week – reeks of negligence and weakness. Just consider this sentence from it: “In response to our request for written evidence at the outset of the Inquiry, MI5 initially provided just six lines of text.”

Or this one: “It was only when Russia completed a ‘hack and leak’ operation against the Democratic National Committee in the US – with the stolen emails being made public a month after the EU referendum – that it appears that the Government belatedly realised the level of threat which Russia could pose in this area, given that the risk thresholds in the Kremlin had clearly shifted, describing the US ‘hack and leak’ as a ‘game changer’, and admitting that ‘prior to what we saw in the States [Russian interference] wasn’t generally understood as a big threat to [electoral] processes’”.

The government headed by Cameron, May and Johnson “took its eye off the ball” and is “still playing catch-up”, the report says. It doesn’t take Hercule Poirot to understand why this might have been. They didn’t want to know what Putin had been up to in the 2016 Brexit referendum, and they didn’t mobilise the security services to investigate it retrospectively, because they knew only too well what the answer might be and didn’t want to go there.

“Who is protecting our democratic process?” asked Kevan Jones, the Labour MP and member of the Intelligence and Security Committee which prepared the report a year ago. “In a nutshell, no-one is.”

Putin, an intelligence officer in East Germany in the 1980s, turned himself into today’s Tsar by means of kleptomania and a reassertion of the military power and techniques of international destabilisation inherited from the Soviet Union. It is brilliantly described in Luke Harding’s new book *Shadow State: Murder, Mayhem and Russia’s Remaking of the West*.

Lenin described his strategy *vis-à-vis* the West as “a state of partial war” and Putin has been thoroughly Leninist in this regard. “This not-quite war involved the elastic and opportunist use of a wide variety of tactics,” writes Harding. “They included deception, concealed penetration, and subversion and

psychological warfare.” And also, as he describes in pitiless detail, assassination and chemical weapon attacks on the streets of Salisbury.

Most of us in parliament suspected Putin’s actions throughout the long drawn-out post-2016 Brexit crisis. It strengthened the case for a second referendum before we left the EU, given the closeness of the 2016 result and the inability of May or Johnson to deliver even an approximation of the benefits of Brexit previously promised by the Leave campaign.

Since we left the EU in January, none of these concerns has weakened. On the contrary, Covid-19 has magnified the risks of diplomatic and economic isolation, while both Putin and now also Xi of China have turned themselves into life dictators whose belligerence and danger increase daily.

“The way forward lies with taking action with our allies,” concludes the

“Germany and France are in the driving seat. Britain, meanwhile, is ever more isolated and at the mercy of Putin and Xi

report. “The West is strongest when it acts collectively and that is the way in which we can best attach a cost to Putin’s action.” Yet the government to which the report is made does precisely the opposite, undermining collective action with our allies in Europe.

A constant refrain of the Brexiters is that the EU is on the verge of collapse, so there is a higher wisdom in preparing for a post-EU world. This British delusion goes right back to the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. My latest biographical subject Ernie Bevin, then foreign secretary, mistakenly thought this a utopian project which would never get off the ground. His Eurosceptic heirs thought the same about the common market and the euro.

Only a few months ago Covid-19 was similarly hailed by Brexiters as proof that the nation state was all we had, and supranationalism had become the new dodo.

Except the dodo is now alive, well, and growing wings. This week’s European Council, after the typical alarms and excursions required to broker agreement on an ambitious EU response to Covid-19, has agreed a bold new Marshall Plan for European recovery. Germany and France are in the driving seat. Britain, meanwhile, is ever more isolated and at the mercy of Putin and Xi.

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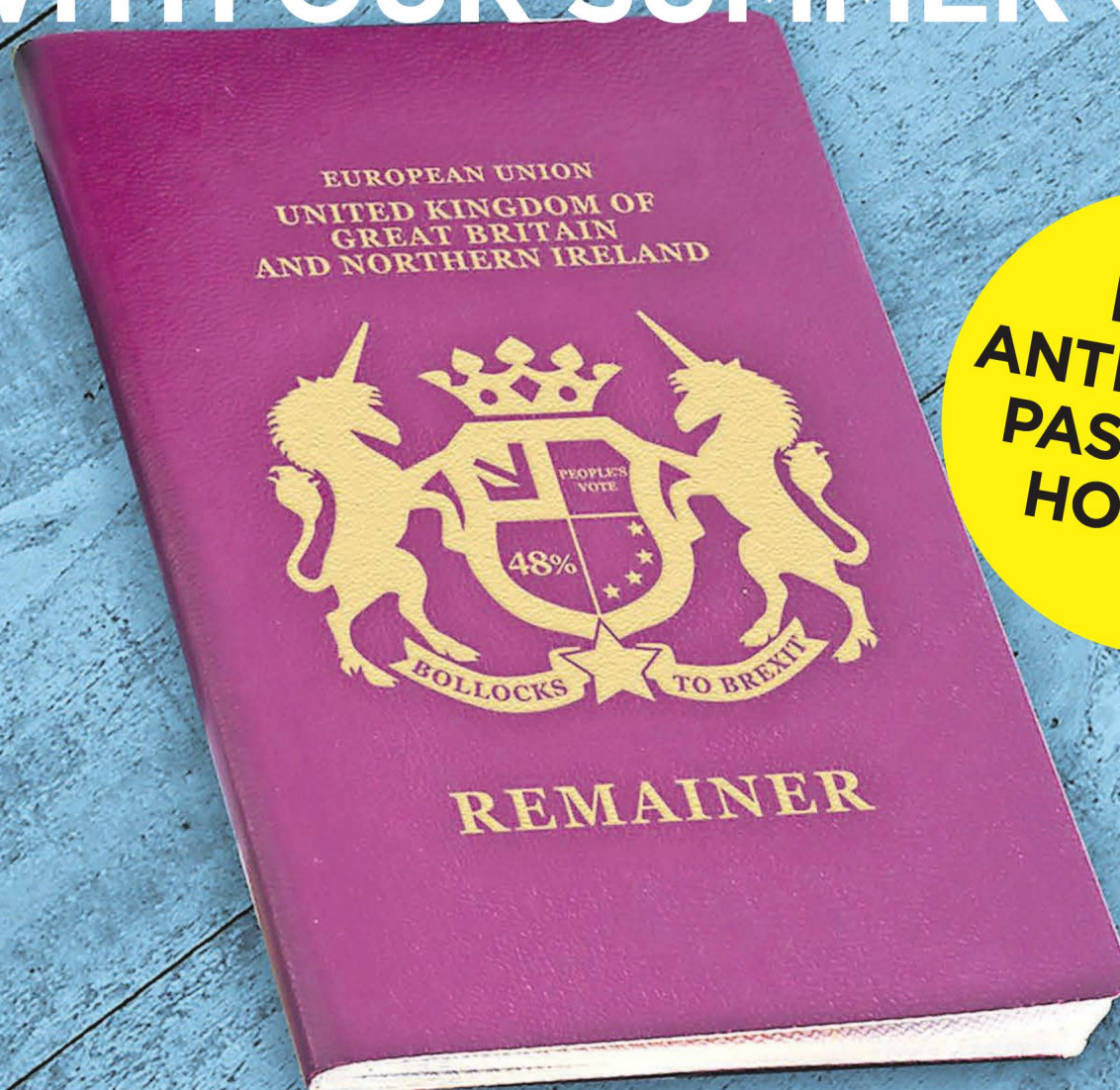
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AGENDA

Putin doesn't have to have the last laugh



**JAMES BALL'S
DECONSTRUCTED**



Reading a report from parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) often feels like trying to deduce a cryptic message from an oracle in Classical literature.

A stinging criticism from an ISC report might typically read "we now have confidence in the agencies' capabilities in this area" – because the 'now' implies they previously lacked that confidence. Lesser things than that have made the headlines in the past.

The latest ISC report – published, finally, on Tuesday – was not like that. There was no need to read between the lines, no need to parse ambiguous phrasing, no general sense of reassurance you needed to know how to decode this document, into Russian activity in the UK. No, this was a stinging criticism of huge swathes of the British establishment, let alone just our government or intelligence agencies.

Elite London institutions were castigated for taking money from Russian oligarchs and becoming their influence-peddlers in exchange. Political parties received fire for taking that same cash, with peers singled out for their outside work, often undeclared thanks to lax parliamentary rules. The government was lambasted for turning a blind eye to all of this, and the intelligence agencies for doing the same – largely for a quiet life.

Given this was a report published for and by the British establishment, it was scathing. It called for wide-ranging actions – new laws, new investigations, new official responsibilities for MI5, and more.

What it didn't do, however, was give us any answers on the Brexit referendum.

In a way, that should not come as a surprise: the ISC exists to scrutinise the UK's security and intelligence agencies. It is neither a policing nor an intelligence agency, nor a regulator. It is a panel of nine members of parliament, aided by a small number of expert advisors and the outside witnesses it consults.

It was never the job of that panel to investigate the Brexit referendum itself. What it *was* tasked with was the role of scrutinising the official investigations carried out behind the scenes by MI5, MI6, GCHQ and some of the inter-agency bodies and ministries which *would* supervise such a thing.

What it brought to light was in some ways more shocking than any substantive revelation – it found that none of the bodies had done anything much at all.

As the USA's FBI uncovered evidence of Russian interferences in its elections, as EU nations uncovered signs of Russian money or influence in their politics, and as UK journalists raised questions about actions here, the agencies seemingly did little.

For some of us who backed Remain, that is itself an indication of conspiracy and wrongdoing: who told the agencies not to investigate? Why didn't ministers want to know more? The silence itself is damning, surely – especially when the government moved almost immediately to reject the committee's recommendation for a public intelligence agency report on interference with the EU referendum.

There is another plausible, but less dramatic, explanation though: the top of the Conservative Party is dominated by an arrogant set of people who don't much care about issues like national cohesion or trust in politics. To those people, challenging the integrity of a vote they had just won felt like a needless pain, and so they didn't opt to launch or back any political public inquiries. Coupled with this would have been the offence to their egos at the idea they might have needed Russia to win a referendum they felt they won fair and square.

Add to that the – quite probably wrong – calculus of not wanting to create any openings for political enemies just before a snap election, and you get the government's decision to delay the report last autumn and now to try to move on quietly from it as quickly as possible. Because there is nothing in it for them personally or politically, why should they cede this ground?

To some the first explanation – of a deliberate conspiracy to silence the issue – will certainly seem the most plausible. But the second – while corrosive to our society, and still largely unforgivable – is the most likely, especially given the margin of victory of 1.3 million votes means that no Russian intervention was likely the decisive factor in the 2016 Brexit vote.

The problem is that this is the last answer we are likely to get on this topic. There won't be a public inquiry or an intelligence agency investigation. And



INFLUENCE:
Russian president
Vladimir Putin
Photo: Getty Images

“We have a national problem that has been ignored by the government for reasons of personal comfort and political gain. We need to make doing so harder, to protect our future elections and our political discourse itself

REPRISALS: Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee Julian Lewis leaves the committee offices before publication of the long-awaited report into Russian interference in the UK

Photo: Getty Images

The meddling from far closer to home

The report's real revelations were in the way the government handled it, says LIZ GERARD



the – understandable – anger at this outcome, and over the government's inaction, risks doing Russia's destabilising work for it.

The way to start tackling the problem of Russian interference is to try to de-politicise it – and that means moving on from it being a proxy fight over Brexit.

Russia doesn't interfere in UK politics because it cares about the well-being of its citizens. Whether it's pushing division over Brexit or posting hacked documents about trade talks and the NHS, it doesn't do it because it has a view on any issue in particular. What it wants is to polarise us and to undermine our faith in our democratic processes.

Given the Kremlin's zero-sum view of the world, it is a win for Russia just to make us less happy and less well-off, even if it doesn't actually benefit Russia in any kind of strategic way.

If what we take from the Russia report is a further loss of faith in our democratic processes (note, this definitely does not mean our current democratic leaders), then it has ultimately benefitted Putin and his administration.

A more constructive response is to try to concentrate on making sure our future elections are safe, and that our members of our establishment and institutions are less vulnerable to being bought up and bought out by oligarchs acting as satellites for the Kremlin's influence.

That will require a political coalition drawing from the right and the left – something which should be eminently doable, as it has been done in the recent past. Making tackling electoral interference a Brexit dividing line doesn't help us do that.

We need new rules requiring stricter oversight of political actors on social media, of automated accounts, of political hacks and data dumps. We need to do more to make sure politicians have to disclose exactly who is paying them for outside jobs and donating for their election – and what meetings they get in return.

We need to know who lobbyists truly represent. We need to make it easier to freeze and confiscate the assets of corrupt people bringing money to the UK.

We have a national problem that has been ignored by the government for reasons of personal comfort and political gain. We need to make doing so harder, to protect our future elections and our political discourse itself.

A first step of that is moving the discussion on from purely fighting and re-fighting the Brexit debate. It's time to look, even if it is anxiously, at our future instead.

Maybe there was no smoking gun. But there was plenty of smoke. And when it finally cleared, it revealed not the Colt 45 that some were hoping to find – that Russia interfered in the Brexit vote – but the possibly more deadly 44 Magnum, the scandal that nobody bothered to make sure that it didn't.

The smoke has been pouring out of the government machine ever since the Intelligence and Security Committee's Russia report was submitted to Downing Street last autumn, starting with a catalogue of reasons why it could not be published before the election. Each of those was listed by Labour committee member Kevan Jones on Tuesday and each rejected as “categorically untrue”.

The more likely explanation was the Dom v Dominic scenario: that D. Cummings couldn't stomach arch-Remainer committee chairman D. Grieve taking centre stage. Grieve had by then been kicked out of the party, so there was every reason to hope that he would not be in Westminster after the election. And so it came to pass.

With the Tories returned with a healthy majority, Boris Johnson immediately authorised the release of the report. What could possibly stop publication now? Try the absence of its authors. Only the intelligence committee could put out the document – and with no committee there could be no report. It took a record seven months to create one.

Even then the whole process was mired in the control-freakery that is the hallmark of this administration. First the membership had to be loaded to give the ruling party a majority that had not previously been the case. Then, having excised independent/cross-bench members, Downing Street set out to impose its choice of chairman on a committee whose right to pick its own leader is protected by law.

The very fact that Johnson and Cummings thought they could hand such an important role to Chris Grayling, knowing the choice would be ridiculed from all quarters, was yet another example of their belief in their invincibility. No matter how appalling any decision, they are sure that they, as the ‘masters’, will get away with it. They just issue the order, and the drones will obey.

And when they don't? Julian Lewis – a man infinitely more qualified for the chairmanship than Grayling – dared to step up and say: “I'll do it.” Given a choice between an orang-utan and Grayling, non-Tory committee members would have voted for the orang-utan, so they naturally went with Lewis. The reprisals were swift and brutal. As with Grieve and his fellow Remainer rebels in the last parliament, the immediate



reaction was ‘chuck him out’, followed by an ‘explanation’ that disintegrated at first glance.

Did Lewis give an assurance that he would vote for Grayling? It doesn't look like it. Did he ‘collude’ with opposition parties? He didn't need to. Simply putting his name forward was enough.

But No.10 cannot tolerate not getting its own way. How much difference does a majority of 80 over one of 79 make, especially when the one is an ardent Brexiter who will still go into the government lobbies 99 times out of a hundred? Who cares if one man's career is destroyed (though he may well be readmitted to the party in time for the next election)? The important thing is to deter anyone else from having the temerity to consider an independent thought.

And it works. On Monday night 338 Tories dutifully voted against amendments to the Trade Bill that would have protected the NHS and food standards and given them the right to approve or veto any deals the government negotiates. MPs who wanted Brexit in order to stop rules being imposed without parliamentary approval actually voted to allow rules to be imposed without parliamentary approval.

The fate of the NHS in any trade deal with America was, of course, a key issue in the election campaign and it may be remembered that Jeremy Corbyn produced a leaked document purporting to show that the NHS was on the table.

Last weekend the third arm of the Dominic Triangle – Raab – claimed that the Russians had “almost certainly” tried to interfere with the 2019 vote through those documents, a finding unconnected to the content of the committee's report. This was the first time a minister had explicitly accused Russia of meddling in our politics, but it was, according to Downing Street, “nonsense” to link the timing of the foreign secretary's remarks – seven months after the election and four days before the release of the Russia report – with the imminent publication.

If a free press wants to push out the words ‘Corbyn’ and ‘Russia’ at such an opportune moment, the government is powerless to stop it. Or, indeed, ‘Scottish independence’ and ‘Russian interference’.

After nine months of the report proving commendably leak-proof, the *Telegraph* got hold of chapter and verse the night before publication. It was all there: attempts to intervene in the Scottish referendum; concerns about oligarchs' money; the non-criticism of Arron Banks. But not, mysteriously, the central complaint that three Tory governments hadn't taken Russian threats to our democracy seriously enough.

The *Telegraph* report's opening sentence – “Russia tried to ‘influence’ the result of the Scottish independence referendum but not the Brexit vote” – was spectacularly misleading.

The committee cited anecdotal evidence of trolls and bots spreading disinformation, but said it had no evidence of direct attempts at interference – because tampering with ballot papers is tricky and no one was on the lookout for other forms of meddling. In spite of the alarm bells that should have been rung by the Scottish experience.

And so, for a country tired of Brexit and bored by an old report they won't read, the smokescreens will do their job.

The committee urged the government to hold a retrospective inquiry into possible Brexit interference. Within the hour, Raab had said no. The caravan had moved on. Rishi was dishing out inflation-busting pay rises to “Covid hero” doctors, teachers and police.

Except there won't actually be any extra money. Hospitals and schools will have to find the cash, if they can, from their existing Covid-stretched budgets. Given that some schools can barely afford books, paper or pencils, the chances of them being able to pay teachers more from September are slim.

But never mind the detail, just look at the headlines.

AGENDA

My travel sickness

The psychological consequences of Brexit are the most devastating, and are just starting to truly sink in... JOHN KAMPFNER on the loss of freedom of movement



In the first week of January 2021 when I arrive at the airport, will I be asked the purpose of my visit? Will my passport be stamped? How long will I be allowed to stay? I posited these questions to a senior British diplomat in a European capital a couple of weeks ago. "Haven't got a clue," he replied. He wasn't saying this to make a point. He genuinely didn't know and was contrite enough to admit it.

Vagueness and uncertainty are not accidental consequences of Brexit. They are part of the plan to distance ordinary Britons from the European way. Brexit is not an economic project (the damage it will do is taken as read, even by its advocates, but thankfully for them the mayhem will be subsumed into the pandemic).

It is a political project, but it is actually more pervasive than that. It is a sociological and psychological project to reposition the island away from near neighbours to whom access we took for granted.

This will have a profound impact, particularly on the younger generation. Many people have yet to grasp how different it will feel. Back to the future.

I am old enough to remember what it used to be like to travel "to the continent"

in the late 1970s and early 1980s. For all but the very wealthy, there were two choices: the package holiday or the car-ferry for the 'daring' traveller.

My parents would stock the Vauxhall with English essentials and plan meticulously for the three-day annual summer holiday to northern Italy. The black passport would stipulate the maximum amount of currency that could be brought.

The ferry journey was the start of the adventure. The stop-overs, just north of Paris and then just south of Lyon, were booked with military precision. Once we arrived in the Italian village, we were greeted as exotic species.

"*Il dottore*", as my GP father was known, was well liked, not least because he practised the language assiduously but haplessly, with the aid of his pocket dictionary.

On the rare occasion we needed to phone home, we would have to book a call at the village post office, while my siblings and I played pinball in the neighbouring bar. It was otherworldly – or perhaps that is my memory playing tricks with my childhood.

We will not return to that, at least not in practical terms – although some of the

symbolism will be eerily reminiscent of a past most outward-looking Brits thought they had long discarded.

Documentation will be required for taking pets; health insurance must be bought; drivers will require an international licence. But travellers are unlikely to opt again for jars of sandwich spread.

Even with Covid and the global emergency, cut-price airlines will not vanish, even if flight shaming leads to an increase in train travel.

What goes through the head is what matters. A few years ago, when I was representing the UK's creative industries, I was asked by a Commons select committee what the biggest difference Brexit would make.

I responded that it would be the effect of removal of freedom of movement on the mindset. It was one thing to permit someone to work in a country, I told them, quite another to welcome them.

The young French woman working in a pub in Brixton to subsidise her music would be a thing of the past. The young Italian graffiti artist wouldn't bother coming. Why? Because they can do it in Berlin or Lisbon or Athens with no hassle.

Being a Spaniard in Sweden will continue to be what it is now – neither exotic nor alien. Europe will stay as it is, an extraordinary melting pot.

Not for the Brits. Nor for Europeans in the UK. Does it matter? Not remotely, according to Priti Patel and politicians like her. Indeed, the erection of barriers is for them something to celebrate. When the home secretary told MPs that Britain would no longer differentiate between EU citizens and those from other countries, she said so with pride. Why, she would argue, do Europeans deserve preferential treatment?

I first heard this line of thinking when chairing a debate on Brexit, during the referendum campaign. Speaking for the Leave camp, a certain Munira Mirza, now the influential head of the policy unit at Number 10, suggested that the EU was a racist construct.

I was dumbstruck. She developed her argument, which went approximately like this: once Britain leaves the EU it will become a global hub, no *the* global hub for international talent from around the world. It will make it easier, not harder, for people to come. But it will not discriminate in favour of Europeans, who tend to be white.

BACK TO THE FUTURE: A couple enjoy the view of the cross-channel ferry terminal from Dover cliffs in 1973

Photo: Getty Images



Therefore, I prodded, both government and voters would be happier than they have ever been with more people from Africa, the Middle East, Indian sub-continent and elsewhere than they have ever been? Therein lies the rub. Making it harder for one group does not lead to easier access for another, especially when one of the driving forces behind Brexit was small island hostility to immigration.

A softening of tone is already much in evidence towards one group of countries (predominantly white). Government ministers have been ordered to prioritise and heap praise on the Anglophone world.

It is the Brits, alongside the Americans and Canadians, talking tough on Russia. It is the Brits, alongside our friends in Australia and New Zealand, giving them hell in China. All of this, of course, belongs to the Johnson fantasy-land of the UK as a global superpower, standing up for rights in a way that the unprincipled Europeans would not do.

Watch it, long term, have an effect. It is to these countries that Brits will turn for their political and cultural bearings, particularly as their language skills continue to deteriorate from the embarrassing to the non-existent.

The Brits will still go on holiday to Europe, Brexiteers and their families among them. Stanley Johnson will enjoy his house in Greece. Nigel Lawson, having tried and failed to get French residency, has been forced, red-faced, to sell up. But he'll sneak over from time to time to a nice chateau.

Once the more onerous paperwork is sorted (there is a burgeoning industry of property solicitors to help), second homers in Umbria and Provence will relax. Young people will continue to go clubbing in Ibiza and Leipzig. Stag and hen parties will continue to descend on Tallinn and Ayia Napa.

In the end, the bare bones of agreement on the basics will not be hard to find. Once the transition period expires, tourists from the UK will get the same treatment as others, visiting for up to 90 days in every 180 days without a visa (far more than most people need). But they will not be allowed to work or study, at least not legally.

They will once again be foreigners; Brits not Europeans. The politics of psychology and identity will become embedded. We will once again be different – just as my parents were all those years ago.

Mandrake

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Saudis find a helpmate in Hammond

Philip Hammond honourably quit as chancellor of the exchequer before Boris Johnson became prime minister.

Mandrake is therefore disappointed to see Hammond, pictured, now taking a more pragmatic approach by working for the Saudi Arabian regime. He has said he will be offering counsel to its finance minister “in the context of the kingdom’s rotating presidency of the G20”.

Why would the Saudis hire Hammond, who’s not known for smooth-talking diplomats and is clearly not on the best of terms with Johnson? Perhaps the clue lies in one of his final acts in office? Just days before resigning as chancellor, Hammond was in Riyadh and his advisers briefed that he had been pressing the Saudi regime to stop broadcasting pirated live sports programming on an illegal internet network called beoutQ, a play on the Qatari-owned network beIN Sports, whose content beoutQ was allegedly using. Now Saudi piracy threatens to tank the kingdom’s planned takeover of Newcastle United Football Club after the World Trade Organisation raised concerns over the brazen intellectual property theft.

Who better to make the kingdom’s case than the man once known as the “quiet assassin”?

Hammond scarcely needs the money. Even before the Saudi gig, he was reportedly making at least £1 million a year after accepting a series of directorships and taking back control of his money-spinning property empire Chiswell (Moorgate) Ltd.

can’t to do much damage as we’re closed for building work until spring 2023,” whispers my informant.

Tea with Dom

There can be few if any players in the long and acrimonious Brexit saga who have conducted themselves with greater equanimity than Dominic Grieve. The former attorney general heard me out politely as I expressed my concerns about Dominic Cummings touring some of the Ministry of Defence’s most sensitive bases as part of yet another government review.

“I’m sure they have a lot of people coming in for a cup of tea and a chat, but that doesn’t mean they let them rifle through the files,” says Grieve. “I’ve no doubt he’s got the relevant clearances and they will know how to handle this.”

The SAS, the specialist military research laboratories at Porton Down in Wiltshire, the Special Boat Service and the Rapid Capabilities Office, which is responsible for special project development, are all on his tour. Cummings has already apparently called on MI5 and MI6, the domestic and foreign intelligence agencies.

It’s depressing that whoever leaked the story of Cummings’ tour had so little faith in the British press they chose to give it to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a newspaper that, needless to say, is not in Rupert Murdoch’s stable.



Rebel voice

With a father in Lord Lawson who was chairman of Vote Leave and a brother in Dominic who is one of Brexit’s most outspoken proponents in journalism, it takes some spirit for Nigella Lawson, pictured, to speak out against the insanity of the policy.

At first hesitant, then mildly sceptical, the celebrity cook is now going into battle with all guns blazing. “Who’s going to tell him?” she inquired, sarcastically, on Twitter when Alok Sharma, the business secretary, gormlessly pointed out on that “seamless trade is vital for our economy”.

One hopes Nigella’s views aren’t causing too much friction within the family. I’m fond of her brother Dominic – he was the one who first put me in charge of the Mandrake column, when it appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* – but it’s been a while now since we last had lunch.

Grayling’s gig

John Bercow always enjoyed a cordial relationship with Chris Grayling during his years as speaker of the House of Commons, but he still had to concede in an interview with Sky News last week that everything the former transport secretary touches “turns to disaster”. Warming to his theme, Bercow added: “He’s congenitally incapable of seeing a problem without making it very considerably worse.”

It may therefore be a blessed relief for all concerned that ‘failing Grayling’ will not now be succeeding Dominic Grieve as the head of the influential committee which scrutinises the work of the national security services. Mandrake is, however, left wondering what the future holds for the National Portrait Gallery as Grayling has just become one of its trustees. “Hopefully he



AGENDA

Imbalance of power



MICHAEL WHITE ON A DANGEROUS GLOBAL CLIMATE EXPOSING DOMESTIC WEAKNESSES

On Sunday I hunted down a book on my shelves which I hadn't read for 40 years, but kept because it opened my mind to the underlying realities of Maoist China.

Chinese Shadows was written in 1974 by Belgian sinologist Pierre Ryckmans, under the pseudonym Simon Leys, after the worst of the Cultural Revolution but two years before Chairman Mao died. Such was its powerful indictment of communist Beijing's rule that the author had to hide from its fashionably vengeful western adherents.

No prizes then for why I tracked down the book in the wake of Britain's dramatic disengagement from that Cameron-promised "golden era" of Sino-British cooperation. Instead we face daily confrontation over Chinese investment policy, the persecution of its Muslim Uighur minority and of Hong Kongers, above all its high-tech, cash-rich penetration of British public life and key infrastructure: 5G kit, nuclear plants and TikTok for the kids, unpicking all or some of it will take a lot of time, expense and political will.

All this alongside the belatedly-published intelligence report on suspected Russian interference in Britain's democratic procedures – relatively overt in the 2014 referendum in Scotland, bot-driven in the Brexit referendum two years later and Theresa May's 2017 election gamble. Islamist-preoccupied M15 took its "eye off the ball" concluded the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) report on which the PM placed his plump bottom in October.

In contrast to US intelligence agencies, our own did little or nothing to investigate this "hot potato". No.10 wants to keep it that way. Its "no need for a retrospective inquiry" response on Tuesday morning was instant and done without consultation, showing yet again that Boris Johnson's Downing Street can show a turn of speed to game the system when it suits. "No evidence of successful interference," it smugly asserts. But how do they know?

Isn't this a bit sudden, lads, I wondered as the boy geniuses at No.10 ratcheted up the anti-Chinese rhetoric under pressure from Tory rebels in search of a cause, while soft-peddalling on this aspect Russian state meddling in our politics? Isn't Johnson's government already fighting a variety of chilly-to-cold wars against Russia over barely-disguised Salisbury poisonings, the seizure of Crimea and other hostile acts?

Doesn't HMG's disdain for serious trade negotiation with the EU 27 leave it increasingly dependent on Donald Trump's volatile and overbearing White House? Isn't the boss's limited attention span meant to be focused on the EU/UK's

post-Brexit trade agreement. Not to mention the pandemic which – contra his assertion in the *Sunday Borisgraph* – is unlikely to be over by Christmas?

To which the answer is: "Yes, Yes and Yes." Back in the real world, bleary-eyed EU leaders emerged from their post-pandemic budget summit at 5.30 on Tuesday morning with their 750 billion euro 'Next Generation' deal. It took nearly five days with much bad temper and a breakdown in social distancing as haggling in sweaty side rooms led Covid masks and gloves to be discarded. At one point, the summit's mum and dad, Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron, walked out in shared frustration. Very unsettling.



Everyone now agrees that, in leading the 'Frugal Four's' resistance to higher spending, the Netherlands has inherited the vacant British role of the EU's Monsieur Non. Congratulations, prime minister Mark Rutte. Someone has to do it. "Spend, spend, spend" Boris wouldn't – even if he still had a vote. His boy, Rishi, is borrowing record amounts (£125 billion in Q2) and giving key workers unfunded pay rises from the Magic Money Tree. "Tough choices ahead," says the chancellor. But not now.

Meanwhile the EU27 got their deal in the end despite "walkouts and fury" headlines in the *Mail*. They did so via messy compromises over loans vs grants (50:50) and reduced pressure on the Polish-Hungarian authoritarians to behave better. And that's the point. Cautious Merkel usually does as much as necessary, as little as possible. A form of joint euro-borrowing has emerged – not quite a "Hamiltonian moment" for the rapper musical's fans, says the *Economist*, legacy debt is not pooled. But faced with an existential challenge, the EU is still staggering forward. At 4.7% of EU GDP the package is bigger than the US's.

It all compares favourably with the Trump-Johnson style of megaphone diplomacy: bullying and bluster, followed by surrender (Boris over the Irish Sea border), rebranding the status quo (Trump over the Nafta trade pact with Mexico), unilateral withdrawal (Iran, WHO, Brexit) or petulant disruption (WTO) and retreat, leaving North Korea's "Little Rocket Man" defiantly in post. Trump blows hot and cold on China and Russia, whose autocratic leaders play him along. John Bolton confirms our suspicions.

And us? Britain faces many of the same problems as our neighbours – soaring unemployment and debt, border control (all those smugglers' dinghies piling up at Dover), Covid-19, climate

change, the scary brilliance of AI and the tax-dodging tech monopolists. Russian subversion, China too. But we face them in not-so-splendid isolation, as we did not (contrary to *Daily Express* legend) in 1940 when the empire and a reliable US helped to arm, defend and feed us.

Before US secretary of state, the Mike ("the WHO killed Britons") Pompeo, flew into London this week, the prime minister let it be known he will not be "a knee-jerk Sinophobe". In the Commons Dominic Raab offered Beijing "tough love" to mend its increasingly aggressive ways. Labour's Lisa Nandy and retired Brexit Bulldog, David Davis, joined ex-TA colonel, Tom Tugendhat MP's campaign to tighten the screws. Balancing backbench armchair bellicosity with realism and the wider national interest will require delicate footwork.

Did I say "delicate"? Johnson famously/notoriously improvises, if not from day to day then very short-termist. We saw that in his flawed response/indifference to the looming pandemic, before he fell victim to the virus. We see it in dither and defective messaging still. The resultant mortality figures are hard to massage, though loyalists try. World-beating at last!

A successful UK "vaccine by Christmas" would repair some lost prestige, so encouraging trial results from Oxford led seven Fleet Street papers on Tuesday. They are desperate for good news. But Oxford's would not be the world's only useful Covid remedy, everyone now realises. It is going to require a collective effort, as is the global economic recovery. Is it the ideal time to engage in a politically-charged trade war with China or Russia, let alone (as Trump may do) with the EU over Google taxes and regulation, German cars as his hostage? Of course not, not when you are already sanctioning Iran and are increasingly embarrassed by your close proximity to Saudi's oppressive Crown Prince.



A Biden presidency next January – if there is one – would ease some of these dilemmas for clients like Britain, but not China or Russia. US sanctions on Chinese kit, as well as diplomatic threats over that symbolic UK/US trade deal, helped force Johnson's Huawei U-turn. Whitehall had to choose. Yet Britain's interests do not always coincide with Washington's as the US squares up to China for challenging its military and economic dominance of the Pacific region. The UK has a legal treaty obligation to defend Hong Kong's two-systems, the territory's liberty now being dismantled. It has none to Taiwan

except to uphold the world order, none to the Uighurs except to support human rights.

Before I first read *Chinese Shadows*, I had been led to believe that Chairman Mao had avoided the worst excesses of the French and Russian revolutions. Hadn't Richard Nixon visited Mao in 1972? The book disabused me: Confucian authoritarianism could be more smothering than the Tsar and Stalin's, the brutality of which I read as a teenager in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940). That book influenced me more than Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) or *1984* (1949).

After Deng Xiaoping, survivor of the Long March and two purges, took over (1978-89) he moved China towards market reforms that will soon make it the world's largest economy. Critics called it "market Stalinism," but hopes that mainland China would evolve liberally to become more like Taiwan or Hong Kong persisted. In 2001 China was even allowed to join the WTO.



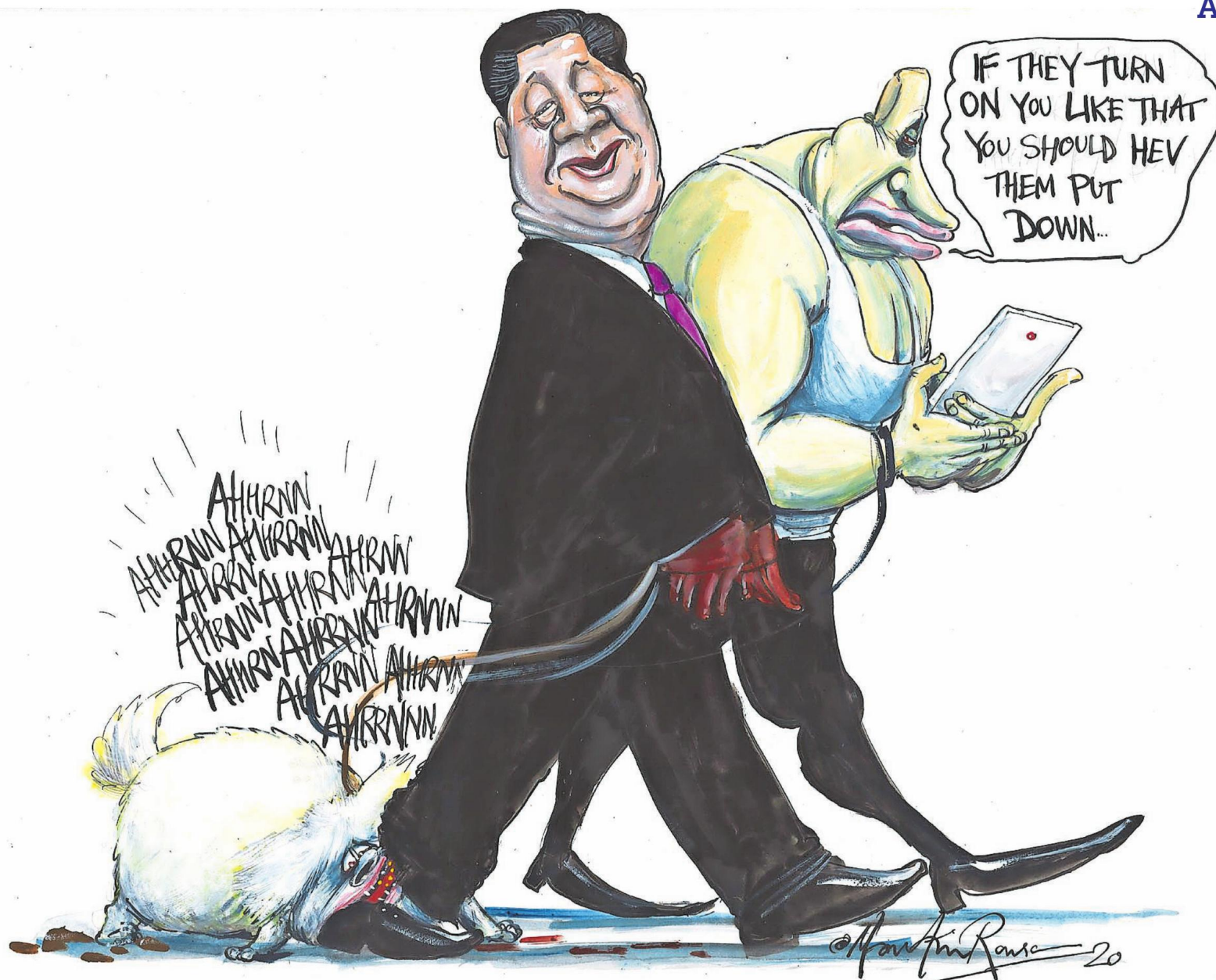
Remember how Ronald Reagan used to say how market economics and liberal democracy were inseparable? How shallow and naïve that now sounds. The extent to which China abused WTO rules on state aid, dumping, intellectual property theft, protectionism and much else was causing concern long before president Trump stumbled on the issue and president Xi rolled back incipient pluralism after 2013.

But middle-sized states, even sovereign ones like Boris's Britain, have to live with the new reality, as Imperial Britain successfully did with the rising US power in the late 19th century (it also cheated economically) but not with the Kaiser's Germany. Both old and emerging power fell disastrously into the now-much-cited Thucydides Trap like 5th century BC Sparta and Athens.

The Soviet economy was never good enough to pose a challenge except to long-suffering Russian consumers. Despite many mistakes and some crimes, the West did contain very real Soviet military power until it fell apart after 1989.

Containment is hard and requires patience and determination, clear strategic thinking even. However many cheerleader articles I read about Dominic Cummings' reading lists and his determination to shake up Whitehall, or Michael Gove's visionary speeches in Ditchley Park about our data driven future, what I actually see most days is petty spite, improvisation and low levels of competence among ministers and a demoralised civil service.

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Chief nurse, Ruth May, dropped from the Covid press rota after refusing to back Dom's Barnard Castle eye test in rehearsal? It seems so. No.10's ethics chief, Helen McNamara, to be moved to a better job while her report into Priti Patel's alleged bullying is shredded? That's the speculation. Ditto Beefy Botham's peerage for services to Brexit. That's shabby even by recent standards. Julian Lewis MP, obsessive but quirkily independent, to lose the Tory whip for displacing No.10's toady nominee, Chris Grayling, as new chair of the ISC. That's a fact.

Then there are the allegations made against Robert Jenrick and the reports of government contracts awarded to associates of ministers and advisers without proper tender procedures. All states face such challenges. Someone told me the other day that there are even Mafia-like aspects to the financial services industry in saintly Canada. But dirty foreign money arriving here in tempting quantities adds to the risk of rot at or near the top, especially when combined with legitimate investment opportunities.

The ISC report fingered banks, estate agents, lawyers, peers as compromised enablers – “wittingly or unwittingly” – by the rouble “laundromat”. It's hardly been a secret. Nor have Russian donations to the Conservative party.

Even before Chernobyl (1986) no one suggested using Russian technology to build UK power stations or indeed toasters. China is different, much as Japan showed over a century ago how adaptable Asian societies can catch up on the West fast – and overtake it. We are the slow coaches now. Just look how we thought we knew better than South Korea, Taiwan or impoverished Vietnam in tackling Covid-19. Coming so soon after 9/11, the Iraq war and Western bank crash, the accumulated loss of grudging respect will be profound.

Chinese capital and engineering prowess has spread around the world at a rate which would have astonished Reagan or Deng, let alone Nixon and Mao who would all have made rapid ideological adjustments to take the credit. I remember feeling as queasy about Chinese involvement at Hinkley Point, Sizewell and – most important – using its own design, for Bradwell's nuclear power plant, as I once did about the first Japanese car exports.

But cars are less important to society's core functions than power stations, highly concentrated in the UK apart from renewable wind/solar, China involved in them too. Huawei has been in Britain for 20 years, offering what is often a cheaper and even better product. As with other

states and their richer citizens buying important British assets – those empty blocks of luxury London flats are merely more conspicuous than rail companies – some took their money without asking enough questions until recently.

The powers obtained by the misuse of artificial intelligence bestows exponentially changes the equation. So in the new Cold War we currently observe a curious double-pronged approach. Traditional low-tech penetration allows Russian oligarchs, pro-regime as well as dissidents, to buy their way into social and cultural elites. Even more opaque pro-China lobbyists allow their paymasters to navigate business and political networks, as our equivalents would never be allowed to do at home – barely more than they were in the weird days when Simon Leys wrote *Chinese Shadows* in the foreigners compound in Beijing.



The other prong of the pincer is covert subversion, increasingly via disruptive social media. The hacking of Covid science research or power grids is an updated form of sabotage and intellectual property theft. That's what Tuesday's ISC report hammers home. Much closer to

China than Britain – much more dependent on its trade too – Australia has pulled back at some cost to its economy. Fleet Street's gleeful exposure of Chinese network by the 48 Group Club reinforces the fearful message. Veteran UK diplomats warn against a revival of “reds under the beds,” but to be vigilant. Clear heads are needed, not hysteria.

It is a far cry from drinks for fellow-travelling trade union leaders at the gloomy Russian embassy on wealthy Kensington Palace Gardens (I went once in the 1970s) or industrial militancy to cripple the car industry. Online asymmetrical warfare conducted by bots spoon-feeding useful idiots is about sowing dissent and division, about weakening our citizens' belief in their own institutions, the EU included. Yet the idea remains the same as it was when Lenin was not an embalmed mummy.

It is working better than it did before. The tragedy is that we too do more now to undermine our institutions as well. When Trump sends in federal troops to foment disorder in sleepy Oregon and threatens not to accept defeat in November – he did both this week – he digs democratic America's grave. Those who persistently abandon their declared values quickly lose them.

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For several decades, China's rise to global power followed wily former premier Deng Xiaoping's maxim to "secure our position but keep a low profile and bide our time". But that was Deng and this is now. The current Chinese leader, Xi Jinping's more belligerent approach is provoking opposition from countries all around the world. China may come to regret changing its subtly successful formula and alienating so many potential partners.

China is the world's most populous country. Deng understood that its return from impoverished obscurity to global power status would cause anxiety amongst other nations – and spark resistance if it threw its considerable weight around too aggressively.

He and his successors did not shy away from asserting what they saw as essential Chinese interests. But, for the most part, they recognised that China was best served by focusing on building its own economic and military strength. Policing the world should be left to others whilst China steadily put itself in a position to exert greater influence over global affairs.

Following such a strategy was possible because, unlike most rising powers throughout history, China did not want to overturn the existing world order. Its prosperity depended upon maintaining the globalised trading system and the security needed to support it. Rather than revolution, China sought steadily to acquire a greater say in the way the system was run.

And this plan was working. China is a much greater presence in the world than it was before Deng's time in office in the 1980s. It is on track to overtake the USA as the world's largest economy during the next decade. China is comfortably the world's second biggest spender on its military, behind the US, and is rapidly increasing the capabilities of its forces. It has also discreetly expanded its influence by steering many of its officials into senior roles in international organisations such as the United Nations.

Xi, though, seems to have decided that China's power has reached the point where restraint is no longer necessary.

Just in recent months, his regime has revoked Hong Kong's 'one country, two systems' special status by enacting a new Security Law that ends the freedoms enshrined in the treaty governing the territory's handover to China from Britain. It has provoked a military skirmish with India across their disputed border by encroaching into the mountainous region of Ladakh. And as part of a longer standing campaign of unilaterally asserting control of the South China Sea, including the territorial waters of its neighbours, its forces sunk a Vietnamese fishing boat.

Xi's change

PAUL KNOTT on the Chinese leader's reckless overreach



These actions form part of a wider pattern of aggression incorporating increased threats against Taiwan, adversarial relations with the US and 'Wolf Warrior diplomacy' (named after a popular Chinese action film with strong nationalist themes).

This style of diplomacy involves spreading baseless conspiracy theories and attempting economic blackmail against those governments who refuse to bend to Beijing's will.

The many targets of Chinese bellicosity include leading democracies such as Australia, which has seen its substantial trading relationship with China curtailed for political reasons, and Canada, which has had two of its citizens detained in China on dubious criminal charges.

The triggers for China to lash out include criticising its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, condemning its authoritarian actions in Hong Kong and questioning the brutal concentration camps it operates against the Muslim Uighur people of its western province, Xinjiang.

Some of China's current conduct can be explained by its historical insecurity rooted in its 'century of humiliation' – the period from 1839 to 1949 when the Chinese empire was subjugated by other powers including Britain, Russia and Japan. This bitter experience makes China unusually sensitive to being challenged and is combining unhealthily with its growing hubris.

But the change in foreign policy is also a product of Xi's own rise. Since being appointed to the top job in 2012, Xi has centralised power in his own hands and cracked down on any opposition or independent thought.

This approach contrasts with most of his predecessors since the death of the megalomaniac founder of communist China Mao Zedong in 1976. Whilst being about as far from a democracy as it is possible to be, Chinese communist party leaders have usually governed on the basis of collective Central Committee responsibility and allowed some shading of opinion within the

system (although the narrow limits of this were grotesquely illustrated by the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre).

Strict authoritarianism eliminates dissenting voices and the discussion of issues on their merits. In its place, it generates a competition amongst officials to show political loyalty to the leader by being the most militant proponents of the party line.

Under Xi, that line reflects the nationalist wing of the Chinese ruling party, from which he cultivated support during his rise through the ranks. Their worldview adheres to the words of the founding father of international relations analysis, the ancient Greek Thucydides, that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must".



Is Berlin behind the curve on Beijing?

As the UK takes a forthright approach to China, Germany remains more muted. CATHRIN SCHAER explains why, and asks whether the EU's most powerful member might change its tune



"Look at situations from all angles and you will become more open" – it seems like a fairly innocuous bit of advice to offer as a so-called 'Monday motivation' to your fans on social media. But German car maker Daimler didn't realise that this simple saying would set off something close to an international diplomatic incident when they posted it on Instagram.

The problem was that the advice, pictured next to a Mercedes Benz parked on a beach, was attributed to Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

After complaints from Chinese users, who threatened to boycott the brand because the Dalai Lama regularly advocates autonomy for the Himalayan territory, Daimler apologised. The Germans even sent a letter to the Chinese ambassador declaring they had never intended to question Beijing's sovereignty over Tibet or to unintentionally support the Dalai Lama. The luxury car company's grovelling apology – one local newspaper headlined their story "Daimler gives in to Chinese propaganda" and a local politician said that the Mercedes managers deserved "a prize for spinelessness" – might have happened more than two years ago but recently it's become a hot topic in Germany again.

The reason: it's just one of the more embarrassing examples of what is seen as German hypocrisy when it comes to the country's relationship with China.

There are plenty of other instances. Some of the most recent include chancellor Angela Merkel's unwillingness to publicly congratulate Taiwan's president on re-election in January, even as her counterparts in France and Britain sent greetings. And this month, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' controversial decision not to feature the Taiwanese flag on their website of bilateral relations also made headlines.

China sees Taiwan as its own territory even as many Taiwanese want independence. The Germans explained that they've never featured the flag because they adhere to the 'one China' policy.

This week, Germany continues to dither about whether to ban Chinese tech giant, Huawei, from telecommunications infrastructure, even as the UK forges ahead.

"On China, it seems that Britain is

turning into the champion of the liberal cause," German foreign policy analyst, Ulrich Speck, wrote on Twitter this week. Germany, meanwhile, is lagging behind.

For the past few years, Germany's motto on China has always been '*Wandel durch Handel*', or 'change through trade'. Germans tend not to have much appetite for sending in the troops. They prefer to spend big on humanitarian causes and trade, in the hope that, by including everyone in the liberal, global order, positive change can be affected.

And as a nation, Germany has good reasons for continuing to kow-tow to China.

Firstly, current uncertainties around the trans-Atlantic relationship and even Nato require a geopolitical balancing act. "Germany – and Merkel in particular – doesn't want to pick a fight with another great power while things are not going well with the US," explains Lucrezia Poggetti, an analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies, or MERICS, based in Berlin. "Everybody is waiting for the US elections, to see if we can work better with the next American administration."

Trans-Atlantic issues also tie into Germany's trade relationship with China. As Noah Barkin pointed out in a March article for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "during the global financial crisis and the eurozone unrest that followed, Germany's close links with China's growing economy helped it weather the storm."

With the German economy expected to contract around 6% this year as a result of the pandemic, that consideration continues to play a big role, Poggetti adds. The EU is China's biggest trading partner, with transactions amounting to 560 billion euros' worth, or around 1.5 billion euros a day, in 2019. And inside the EU, Germany is the most significant player: imports and exports between the two added up to around 206 billion euros last year.

The UK's trade with China only comes in at under half of that, around 80 billion euros in 2019. So in many ways, it's easy to argue that, of all European nations, Germany has the most to lose when it comes to antagonising China.

But this is also where the argument starts to fray a little.

German language press coverage of the issue certainly gives the "distinct impression that Germany is helpless and incapable of action," researcher Zhu Yi, at the University of Heidelberg's Institute of Chinese Studies, pointed out recently in a study called "How Dependent is Germany on China?"

After evaluating more than 650 articles published on the topic between 2017 and March 2020, she noted there was much discussion about Germany being "trapped between two superpowers" as well as frequent use of words like "dilemma", "trap" and "quandary".

But in fact, the situation isn't that dramatic. "Generally there's been a

type of coordinated resistance and attempts at containment that it so resents.

One of Beijing's biggest weaknesses is that it has few substantial allies of the sort that long underpinned the US' superpower status. Countries such as Pakistan and Cambodia only hew to China for what they can get out of it financially.

They would not be much help in a global power struggle. Russia is heftier but its greatest value to China is as a natural resource supplier. Surface bonhomie masks Russian resentment at China overshadowing it and fears about the impact of its rise on Russia's vulnerable far eastern regions.

There is a fundamental disconnect beneath their alliance of convenience too. Russia is only able to influence the world by disrupting the very globalised system that China relies upon to thrive.

China's lack of friends mattered less whilst it was following Deng Xiaoping's advice to be patient and keep a low profile. Until recently, most countries, including US allies in Europe and Asia, were happy to acquiesce in what China touted as its 'peaceful rise', while profiting from the burgeoning economic opportunities it offered.

The Xi government's domineering behaviour is changing all that. The ramping up of this approach since early 2020 suggests a decision by Xi to push back hard against the opprobrium China was receiving for being the source of the Covid-19 outbreak and bungling its initial response to it.

It also looks like an attempt by the Chinese regime to exploit the world's attention being consumed by the pandemic to increase its control over Hong Kong and the South China Sea.

Perhaps most of all, Xi seems to see the feebleness, insularity and incoherence of the Trump administration as a golden opportunity to turn China's new power into greater global dominance.

But Trump will not be around for ever or even, one hopes, beyond this year. And US misgivings about China's conduct will persist after he has gone. Worse for China, its belligerence is forcing other countries to pick sides.

Few of the most politically and economically significant of them are likely to choose Beijing. The beginnings of this process are already clear in instances such as the UK's cancellation of Chinese company Huawei's involvement in its new 5G network, the EU and India's adoption of more protectionist measures against Chinese interests and Australia's decision to increase its defence spending.

The increasingly confrontational atmosphere poses grave risks to the world, particularly if China decides to follow through militarily on its threats against Taiwan or Japanese-controlled islands.

The US is committed to defending those nations and a conflict would be disastrous for all sides. Even if Xi does tone down his nation's aggression, China's recent posture has already made the world much more wary of it and guaranteed greater resistance to its rise. Xi's gamble on changing his wise predecessors winning formula may be one China comes to regret.

SUPERPOWER: The Liaoning, right of picture, one of China's two aircraft carriers, in Hong Kong waters

Inset left, president Xi Jinping is gambling on turning China's increased power into greater global dominance

Photos: Getty Images



For them, global politics is an adversarial contest between powers, rather than an opportunity for mutually-beneficial cooperation.

In Xi's eyes, China's main adversary is the United States and its allies. He has expressed intense dislike of what he sees as the West's inclination to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries (Chinese interference and bullying around the world is apparently less of an issue for him).

The Xi-ites have a particular aversion to the containment policy the democratic world used successfully against the Soviet Union and fear it being reprised against China.

The conundrum for China is that overtly going on the offensive makes it much more likely that it will face the

AGENDA

Euronews:

GERMAN GOVERNORS CALL FOR HALT TO US TROOP WITHDRAWAL

The governors of four German states that are home to US military facilities are urging members of Congress to try to force Donald Trump to back down on plans to withdraw more than a quarter of American troops from the country.

In the letter, the governors of Bavaria, Hesse, Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate said American facilities such as the Grafenwoehr training area, the Ramstein and Spangdahlem air bases, the Landstuhl Regional Medical Centre hospital and the headquarters of US European Command "form the backbone of the US presence in Europe and Nato's ability to act". The US currently has about 34,500 troops in Germany, which Trump has ordered to be reduced to 25,000. Many members of Congress have spoken out against the plan, and the German governors in their letter emphasised that the American troops "serve the strategic interests of the United States" as much as Nato interests and the trans-Atlantic partnership.

SEPARATISTS PROTEST SPANISH ROYALS' VISIT TO CATALONIA

Hundreds of Catalan independence supporters protested over a visit by King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia to the region, during a royal tour across Spain meant to boost morale during the coronavirus pandemic.

The visit came amid mounting media reports accusing the king's father, former monarch Juan Carlos I, of allegedly hiding millions of untaxed euros in offshore funds.

Prosecutors in the country's Supreme Court are determining whether Juan Carlos can be investigated for allegedly receiving the funds from Saudi Arabia, possibly as kickbacks for a high-speed railway project. The former king has not publicly addressed the allegations against him. Juan Carlos abdicated on behalf of his son in 2014.

US ORDERS SANCTIONS ON CHECHNYA'S STRONGMAN RULER

The US has slapped sanctions on the strongman leader of Russia's republic of Chechnya over human rights violations including torture and extrajudicial killings.

Ramzan Kadyrov, 43, has run Chechnya like his personal fiefdom, relying on security forces to quash dissent, and international human rights groups have accused him and his lieutenants of abductions, torture and killings of opponents. Chechen authorities have denied the accusations.

Kadyrov responded to the sanctions on his blog, posting a picture of himself standing in a weapons storage room with a smile on his face and a machine gun in each hand.

He addressed the US secretary of state, who announced the measures: "[Mike] Pompeo, we accept the fight. It's going to be even more fun down the road."

ALGERIAN MAN DIES IN ANTWERP FOLLOWING POLICE ARREST

The prosecutor's office in the Belgian city of Antwerp has launched a judicial investigation following the death of a 29-year-old Algerian man hours after his arrest by police.

Amid accusations of police brutality on social media under the hashtag #MurderInAntwerp, police spokesman Sven Lommaert said officers intervened at a cafe terrace in central Antwerp after the man started assaulting people and throwing furniture around.



COSY: German chancellor Angela Merkel and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at a photocall during German-Chinese talks in Beijing, 2019

Photo: Getty Images

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tendency to put economic interests before values-based considerations and lots of discussion about how Germany is the country most dependent on China," MERICS' Poggetti agreed. "But at the same time, it's important to look more closely at trade data." Preliminary figures for 2019 suggest that of 1.32 trillion euros worth of German exports, 7% went to China. But more – about 9.5% of all German exports – went to the US. And by far the biggest market for German goods was the EU itself, with the country shipping more than 58% of total exports – around 777 million euros worth – to other member states last year.

"Overall, the export dependency on China appears limited," experts at the Cologne Institute for Economic Research wrote in a special study on German dependence on China. It is just "the high sales shares of some large German companies in China that distort the picture," they concluded. German trade associations estimate that for around a tenth of the approximately 8,000 German companies present in China, the Asian nation is their most important customer. That includes some of the country's biggest and most politically-influential firms, the likes of VW, Daimler and Siemens.

"So the question is this," Thorsten Benner, director of the Berlin-based think tank, Global Public Policy Institute, or GPPi, suggests: "At what point will the German government say that there's no more political cover for those companies disproportionately dependent on the Chinese market? At what point do they decide not to self-censor because of those companies?" A new phase in Germany's China relationship is on the way, MERICS director, Mikko Huotari confirmed to local media in July. "China has become a domestic political issue too."

Inside Germany, there's been a growing chorus of criticism, as important business groups, such as the Federation of German Industries, record disillusionment about lack of market reform in China, opposition politicians point out the Merkel administration's

cynicism and toothlessness on China human rights issues and experts complain about Germany's outdated and possibly still a little naïve view of the Middle Kingdom. Outside of Germany, other EU member states tend to view Germany's cosy bilateral friendship with China as self-serving.

Current events have accelerated this negative trend. The Covid-19 pandemic has Germans asking why their supply chains, and in particular, supply chains for important medical goods, are so dependent on the Chinese. Anger at the brutal detention of Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang region and the suppression of demonstrations in Hong Kong, plus the ongoing debate raging around cybersecurity and Huawei's future in EU telecommunications networks, have all led to more of a spirited debate on the subject.

Voter attitudes also seem to be changing. Although polls show that close to half of Germans believe that China is important for their country's future, a recent survey, Transatlantic Trends 2020 led by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, found that more than half – 61% – now have negative views of "China's rising influence". Before the pandemic started, only 51% felt that way.

Close to 60% of the around 1,000 Germans surveyed also said they wanted their country to get tougher on China in the following areas: human rights, climate change and cybersecurity. Interestingly, when it came to trade, 37% were happy with the status quo, although it's not clear how more combativeness on the former issues won't cancel the latter out.

In many ways, the current attitude to China can be seen as typical of Germany's long-standing soft-power foreign policy as well as trade policies based – logically – on the national interest, as well as Angela Merkel's bet-hedging, non-confrontational leadership style. As a nation, all of that makes sense.

However in the face of Chinese transgressions and broken promises, both political and economic, it's also becoming clear that any one country will find it difficult to stand against the Asian

behemoth. Opposition must come from Europe as a bloc, experts say.

"It is hard for Europe to envisage a neutral bilateral relationship with Beijing anymore," researchers at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote this month. Despite ongoing hopes for an EU-China trade deal, brokered during Germany's EU presidency, by the end of the year, "Europe is tailoring a much more defensive and assertive approach," they confirmed, one driven by the feeling that China "is backsliding toward becoming more authoritarian at home and more assertive abroad".

And in that, "Germany has an incredibly important role to play," Benner says.

"Everyone is aware that nobody is going to be able to change China anytime soon," Poggetti of MERICS says. "China is here to stay. So it's not about disengagement. It's about smarter engagement."

"We hold a lot of high level dialogues with China on values-related issues, but China doesn't really follow through on any of its rhetoric," Poggetti says, noting that China needs Europe as much as Europe needs China. "We need to hold China more accountable for that and put some sticks on the negotiating table, as well as carrots." She also points to the fact that Germany has been behind important EU initiatives like legislation on direct investment screening and an European industrial policy, both of which could eventually limit Chinese firms' ability to operate as freely in the single market.

For Benner, the whole argument comes down to what you believe the future holds. "It very much depends on where you see Europe's place in this century," he said. "If you see it [Europe] as a tributary to Beijing in a Chinese century, then OK, that requires pre-emptive obedience. We better play ball and not provoke Beijing."

"But if you think that open societies can stand together and pursue their own path in this century, and assert their independence, then we don't need to do that," he concludes. "It really depends on your ambitions."

Keir Starmer's relative silence on Brexit has frustrated some Remainers. But BEN BRADSHAW – one of Labour's most prominent Europhile MPs – insists his strategy is the right one



Why Starmer is spot on over Brexit

It was April 2016. I was at the annual Anglo-German Koenigswinter Conference in Oxford.

Attended by politicians, journalists, academics and people from business and industry, Koenigswinter started after the Second World War to foster reconciliation between our two countries. The 2016 conference attracted a particularly strong interest, falling during Britain's EU referendum campaign.

I arrived in an anxious mood. I had spent every spare moment of the preceding few weeks knocking on doors in my constituency for the Remain campaign. What I'd found did not correspond with the opinion polls or with the complacent atmosphere of the assembled gathering.

The conference began with a presentation by leading pollster, Peter Kellner, of YouGov.

Peter went through the figures at that time, which showed a small but comfortable lead for the Remain campaign. While the margin of error meant nothing was certain, his assessment was that Remain's lead would be likely to firm up, as undecided voters opted for the safety of the status quo.

I raised my hand to speak in the following discussion.

"I'm worried," I began, "there are too many traditional Labour voters who are planning to vote Leave. Some, because they are convinced Eurosceptics, but most because they either do not know that the Labour Party backs Remain or because they see a campaign fronted by David Cameron and George Osborne, figures they loath, and are saying to themselves: 'If they're in favour of it, I'm against it.'"

Part of the responsibility for this undoubtedly lay with the then Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, whose half-hearted approach to the referendum is well documented. But the greater responsibility lay with David Cameron and the government. They were in charge of the campaign and arrogantly thought they could win the referendum on their own. "Where are the trade union voices?" I asked. "Why aren't you using respected figures like the TUC's Frances O'Grady, senior Labour politicians who aren't Jeremy Corbyn, non-politicians, people from civic society?" And then I made my prediction that if the campaign didn't change dramatically, we were going to lose.

It's important to go back over some of this history. We'll all have slightly different versions of it. But unless, as pro-Europeans, we are prepared to try to find a common understanding of how we got to where we are now, we won't get the important decisions about the present and the future right.

The period from the referendum result in 2016 to the general election result in 2017 was a dismal one for pro-Europeans.



The best we could hope for under the new prime minister, Theresa May, was that the Commons majority that existed for a soft Brexit would prevail. But that would have meant May making common cause with Labour and splitting her party, something she was unwilling or lacked the courage to do.

When she called the early election in 2017, we thought the game was up. The Tories were more than 20% ahead in the polls. Everything pointed to a Conservative landslide. Pro-Europeans' last hope was that if May was returned with a bigger majority, she would be able to ignore her hard-liners and cut the soft Brexit deal that was in the country's best interests.

But the worst Tory election campaign in memory and an unexpectedly strong showing by Labour – thanks to tactical voting by Remainers – changed everything.

I texted my husband straight after the exit poll came out saying: "This means we have a chance to stop Brexit."

With no majority, May would either have to work seriously with Labour on a soft Brexit or come up with something

LONG GAME:
Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer
Photo: Getty Images

herself to put back to the public in a confirmatory referendum. There then followed two years of gruelling parliamentary trench warfare and, running in parallel, a campaign within Labour, ultimately successful, to shift Corbyn, first towards a single market/customs union-type Brexit and, eventually, to supporting a confirmatory referendum on any deal with the option to Remain.

When Johnson ousted May in the internal Tory coup of last summer, it was obvious that his and Cummings' strategy was to force another election, which, because of Johnson's greater appeal and campaigning skills, public fatigue with Brexit deadlock and the unpopularity of the Labour leader, they believed they would win.

But there was no simple route to an election because of the Fixed Term Parliament Act. So, they closed down parliament unlawfully, created the political narrative of 'the people versus parliament', and fostered a sense of crisis designed to make people believe a fresh election was the only way out.

It wasn't. The parliamentary numbers for a second referendum had been growing all the time. There were still, then, enough moderate Tory MPs prepared to support a People's Vote once all the other options were exhausted to make a Commons majority. Corbyn and his immediate circle wanted an election. But they were pulled back by a Parliamentary Labour Party, virtually unanimous in its view that the result would be a bloodbath.

The SNP wanted an election, in which they expected to clean up in Scotland, while claiming they didn't. So, when the Liberal Democrats, also riding high in the polls and expecting to gain seats, decided to grant Johnson his wish, it was game over. Johnson had the simple Commons majority he needed to go to the country and further opposition from Labour to an election was pointless.

Scroll forward to today. When people ask me why isn't Keir Starmer going more on the attack over Brexit or calling for an extension to the transition period, they are failing to recognise the political reality.

With a majority of more than 80, Johnson can do what he wants. It would be futile for an opposition leader to call for something he or she doesn't have the power to deliver.

Far better to remind people of the promises Johnson made of an "oven ready" deal and the commitments he signed up to in the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration and do what we can to hold him to them.

When Britain gets a bad deal or crashes out with no deal at the end of this year, Keir can remind the country of Johnson's broken promises and make the case that he would have done better, just as he has over the government's mismanagement of the Covid pandemic.

Like millions of others in this country, I hope that one day in some form the UK will resume our place in the European family of nations. But that's not for now. Brexit will be completed on this government's terms. This parliament has at least four more years to run. Who knows where we will be by summer 2024?

We must and will tirelessly highlight the damage. And when the next election comes Labour will need a credible attractive policy on Europe that reflects our internationalist and pro-European instincts.

But Keir's current strategy now is the right one.

Brexit is still a disaster for Britain and Johnson's Brexit the worst we feared. He and the Tories must be made to own it. It will fall to the next Labour government to pick up the pieces and begin to repair the damage.

■ Ben Bradshaw is the Labour MP for Exeter

LETTERS: Have your say, email letters@theneweuropean.co.uk

How not to go around the world (or EU) in 180 days

Before the recent negotiations started the UK stated that it was happy for EU citizens to visit the UK for up to 180 days at a time, visa-free. But Britain has failed to include in its negotiating objectives a reciprocal offer and the EU offer has (apparently) not moved from its standard 90 days in any 180-day period.

Many thousands of people will be affected by this 90-day restriction: second homeowners, those with boats that cruise the continent, gap year students, retired travellers and motor homers.

For example, the owner of a boat moored in the EU makes their first visit of the year to the boat in July and cruises for 90 days and then leaves. The owner cannot return until January the following year under the 180-day rule and has thus only been able to stay for 90 days the whole year as he/she cannot utilise any of the time not spent in the EU from January to June towards the 180 days.

Any further ad hoc visits at the start of the following year would then need to be in the period January to March (i.e. not after April) to avoid compromising an annual summer cruise of 90 days in July.

Longer stay visas are available from some countries but the process of obtaining one is generally long-winded, expensive and requires proof of income/wealth and health insurance. Half a million people could be potentially affected by this, with billions of pounds worth of property unusable.

John Frazer

The government plans to reduce the need for foreign workers in certain sectors by encouraging higher wages, so attracting domestic workers.

All good economic stuff but hasn't paying people a fair wage been a European concept for quite a while? As compared to the American business model we've followed to date, of screwing workers down to their bare bones? Think gig economy, zero-hour contracts etc.

Does this mean our glorious leader Dominic Cummings and his PR trumpet, Boris Johnson, are thinking more European as we depart the EU?

P Howie
Weymouth

Boris' bomb

Top marks to Liz Gerard ("Time for the Tories to set things right", *TNE* #203) as she reviewed Johnson's scorecard of ineptitude and evasion. After the Tory media's fawning approval of government propaganda, this punch-after-punch attack was uplifting. Labour should take note.

A leadership resistant to reality is fixated on finishing Brexit trade negotiations in the midst of an all-consuming pandemic that will weaken our broken economy further, with

Animal readers of THE NEW EUROPEAN

Reader Liz Anderson writes: "This is Bonnie. A long-standing pro-European and Chelsea supporter, she nonetheless admits to being a huge admirer of Jürgen Klopp's philosophy and management style, and wishes he was running the UK government right now."

Reader Ryan Hollinsworth writes:

"Penny, my Lhasa Apso, is a massive fan of *TNE*! Keep up the good work and happy belated 200th issue"

■ Does the animal who runs your household read *TNE*? Send photographic evidence and crucial biographical details to letters@theneweuropean.co.uk, putting 'Animal Readers' in the subject field.



Bonnie



Penny

The cover of asks *TNE* #203 asks "So how was your first year Mr Johnson?" The appropriate answer is "bloody awful".

What frustrates me is that the section of the British electorate that voted for Johnson to be leader of the Conservative Party, then leader of the country, seems unable to discern fact from fiction (Johnson's record in office) and genuine character from celebrity.

Tony Olsson
Kirkby-in-Ashfield

There is not enough in *TNE* – even in the interesting letters page – about how to win in 2024. If we consider that the only way to beat Johnson is to have a single offering from the Lib Dems, Labour, Greens, the SNP (if Scotland has not gone by then) and others then it is not too soon to start to create the conditions to achieve this?

Not easy, but a split vote will allow the ideologues to play with the democratic part of the population instead of getting back into power and stopping the slide to dictatorship with a democratic facade.

Steve Bell
Truro

Speechless

Re: Matt Withers' interview with Ruth Smeeth ("You can't shut someone down because you don't like what they've said", *TNE* #203). Free speech is never free.

In a civilised society, there are certain norms which demand censorship. If a person or group sets out, because of their own agenda, to cause hurt and division within society there should be a public outcry.

For example in my town, in Rotherham and in Rochdale the far-right held demonstrations with chanting that "Asian men are paedophiles". Others claim the Holocaust did not take place. Would Ruth Smeeth say they have a right to free speech?

Her support for a rich celebrity saying without any evidence or research that trans men and women are not genuine and that trans women are a threat in women-only spaces is no different to the above statements. Hurt is caused to a vulnerable group where many have suffered to come out and say, "this is me".

Roberta Hallam
Secretary, Keighley LGBTQ group

As one of Ruth Smeeth's constituents until the last election, I was delighted to see that she has bounced back.

I was one of those who nominated her unsuccessful Conservative rival in 2015 when she succeeded Joan Walley as MP.

gridlocked freight and supply chain shortages likely.

A slogan of "Get Brexit Done" – and ignore the consequences – has opened a mass of uncertainties for the nation as we face increasing social, economic and environmental pressures. These challenges far and away transcend the complacent post-Brexit stance. Are we really prepared to sit back for a generation, as some suggest?

Our debt burden is exploding yet plans to spend absurd amounts of money on a £205 billion nuclear weapons upgrade and a no-deal Brexit continue. We need a complete evaluation of defence priorities when fundamentalist terrorists kill at will in our streets and a mutated virus brings the world to its knees in weeks.

A coherent opposition alliance is vital, focused on campaigning for a complete overhaul of our failing politics for a fairer electoral system and a corrupt and devalued honours system. We also need to curb speculator-driven ultra-volatile financial markets that weaken economies further, limiting instant profit movements to more stable adjustments.

The immense challenge the virus brings shows that we can rapidly change the way we live and the way we think in ways that will help us transition to a

more sustainable pathway and a job-creating 'green' economy.

Brian McGavin
Wilmslow

In her imagined letter to a Tory MP from a constituent, Liz Gerard writes: "Did it surprise you to learn that the PM intended to spend nearly a million pounds having an aeroplane painted?" I fear this story may be a "straight banana directive".

According to a reader's letter in last week's *Private Eye* the sum is largely made up of the cost of a maintenance check necessary to retain the plane's airworthiness certificate from the European Aviation Safety Agency, which involves taking it apart for inspection and overhaul including removing the paint to inspect the metal skin of the fuselage. Therefore the PM's jingoistic paint job, while vulgar and cringe-making, cost little public money.

We are likely to experience an all too real disaster when transition ends. We Rejoinders have no need of straight bananas.

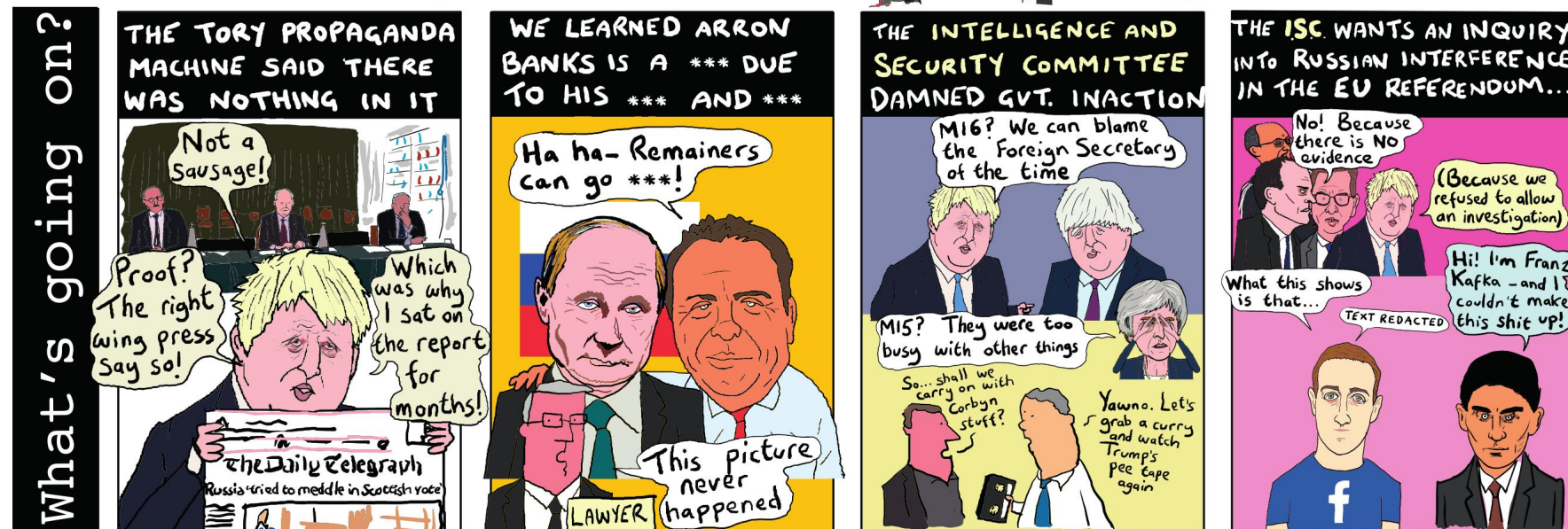
Stephen Horne
London N4



What did we learn from the 'Russia Report'?



TIM ***DFORD



When the Conservative party went for Brexit I drifted out. When it settled for Boris Johnson as leader I signed up to the Liberal Democrats.

During the last election campaign I, like many others of all parties, was appalled by the virulence of the onslaughts on Ruth Smeeth. No wonder her office was guarded as heavily as Fort Knox.

In the circumstances Index on Censorship is lucky to have this tough-minded and widely respected lady as its chief executive. It is certainly no sinecure. How ironic it is that we are trying to defend free speech in Hong Kong while risking losing it here!

Margaret Brown
Burslem

Persist, resist

I couldn't agree more than with Peter Roberts ("Keep fighting", Letters *TNE* #203). I miss campaigning.

Unfortunately, marches are out of the question at the moment. However, we can still do a lot. We can start small, open-air meetings in parks/squares, join Zoom meetings etc. We can delay the worst effects of the B-word even further.

Richard Duployen
Abingdon-on-Thames

Peter Roberts makes a very good point that we must turn to and widen the campaign against the insanity of Brexit. The UK is now drifting toward a no-deal Brexit, with the inevitable appalling consequences for the country.

We cannot allow this to happen, and much more assertive action must be taken.

When safe, can *TNE* and the European Movement jointly organise periodic assemblies and marches demanding we return to the EU?

This would be the start of our endeavours to save the country from impoverishment.

John Ritson
Lewes

BETTER LETTERS

In these unprecedented times, we are receiving an unprecedented amount of correspondence. To stand the best chance of having your letter published in full...

■ Email letters@
theneweuropean.co.uk
before 9am on Tuesday for
possible inclusion in the
following Thursday's edition.

■ Put the contents of your
letter in the body of your
email rather than adding an
attachment, such as a PDF.

■ Please be concise. With
limited space available,
letters over five paragraphs
long will almost always be
edited before printing.
Thank you!

It was refreshing to read Peter Roberts' letter.

Right now, the focus – in your newspaper as elsewhere – is inevitably on the government's mishandling of Covid-19. It seems increasingly possible, and appropriate, that Boris Johnson will be called to account for this in the medium term. However, an end to his prime ministership won't necessarily bring an end to Tory rule, or prevent a hard Brexit that will remove our remaining rights as European citizens in just over five months' time.

We're not going to get those rights back any time soon, but it makes sense to flag their loss as a rallying-cry for the future. The Stay European campaign for individual European citizenship (www.stayeuropean.org) looks like being the one to support right now – not because it stands much chance of immediate success, but because it focuses so clearly on what we're about to lose.

In a few years' time, under a different government, that could turn out to be a very shrewd investment indeed.

Norman Jope
Plymouth

Sour note

Adam Behr (*TNE* #203) describes the Arts Council's emphasis as "rather patrician". So far as music is concerned, at least, yours is very much the opposite. You seem to assume that classical music is of little or no interest for your readers.

Carolyn Beckingham

Editor's note: This week's Eurofile section contains two articles about classical music which we hope you will enjoy.

Moral amaze

Hooray! Someone has mentioned moral principles. Thank you to Alastair Campbell and *The New European* ("We need a Nolan", *TNE* #203) for stating Nolan's seven, which we really need now.

May I suggest two other guiding words? 'Honour' is how I view myself, and 'reputation' is how other people see me. Perhaps MPs, those honourable gentlemen and ladies, could think about these two words with reference to themselves?

Alisoun Gardner-Medwin
Heddon on the Wall

Standing up

John Kampfner writes that the European Union must take a stand on foreign relations (*TNE* #203) but he does not seem to know the EU very well.

The EU has an external action service, which acts as a shared diplomatic service, and a border and coastguard agency, Frontex. There is a common foreign and security policy, a common defence and security policy and a European neighbourhood policy.

In March 2015, the European Council "concluded that it does not recognise and continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia and will remain committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy".

A list of all EU sanctions in force, such as against Crimea and Sevastopol, freezing the EU bank accounts of named individuals, and a ban on handling gold from North Korea's banks, is on the website sanctionsmap.eu.

There are shared EU missions, such as anti-piracy patrols off Somalia. The EU's neighbourhood policy seeks to engage with nearby countries such as Libya, because Europe does not stop at its borders.

Phil Jones
Member, European Movement UK

Hidden killer

James Ball compares the economic downside of a lockdown and the health risks of a lifting of restrictions ("Better at breaking than building things", *TNE* #201). What he and so many other commentators have failed to do is acknowledge the major implications for our mental and physical health of the continued lockdown.

We are told that alcohol consumption has risen by 25% since lockdown. Given that more than 20% of the adult population is teetotal, we can assume that a significant number of people are drinking at clinically dangerous levels since March. It is far easier to acquire an addiction than it is to recover from one. Addictions thrive in isolation.

Child psychologists and paediatricians are warning that keeping children away from school is creating a timebomb of

AGENDA

▶ From page 15

depression and obesity amongst our young people.

Loneliness itself is a killer, as big as smoking or obesity. There is much research which shows that being socially isolated can increase the chance of premature death by 30%. The NHS warns that electronic communication is no substitute for human contact.

When this nightmare is over, we need a similar national effort to ensure that we start to connect with each other in our day-to-day lives. Zoom meetings should carry a health warning. Otherwise, we will suffer health problems that will ripple down the generations.

It is not for nothing that solitary confinement is one of the cruellest judicial punishments and often leads to madness.

John Rossington

Red flag

Little wonder that Johnson and Cummings used every piece of political skulduggery to keep the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee report into Russian interference in our democracy away from the public before last December's general election.

Its indictment over government failings to safeguard both the 2014 Scottish referendum and 2016 EU referendum from Moscow's covert manipulation would have clearly undermined their claim to be putting the national interests of the United Kingdom first in pursuing a hard no-deal Brexit.

It also sadly demonstrates that the forces behind Brexit have left the country more divided and more vulnerable to predatory states like Russia.

So much for Johnson's 'Splendid Isolation' foreign policy. It increasingly looks more like 'Billy No Mates'.

Paul Dolan
Northwich

Rs and elbows

It came as no real surprise when the chief nurse Ruth May, speaking to the public account committee in parliament, finally confirmed that her appearances at the daily No.10 press conferences were cancelled due to her lack of support for Dominic Cummings' visit to his parents home in County Durham.

It's right that professionals advise and ministers decide but removing these same professionals from the debate and silencing them is something one might expect of other nations and one springs to mind.

As we digest the finding of the Russia report, it's reassuring that we have great health professionals who act with the highest level of integrity but it's such a shame that this government and its advisors in Number 10 have none.

How can we as a nation have any confidence in the words and deeds of our government as we try to navigate our way through the greatest health and economic crisis this country has ever faced?

Peter Benson

Lost gold

I wonder if any of your readers have had the experience of getting lost – it starts of knowing where you are going, but somewhere you miss a signpost or turning, but don't realise it at the time.

At some point further on, it slowly dawns on you that things aren't quite right, but you carry on confident that things will come right. Then as you get more desperate, you make wilder decisions – I'm sure that path or road is heading in the right direction and will bring us to our destination – it doesn't and you get more lost...

I was reflecting on this as I watched the BBC's coverage of the 2102 Olympics with my 20-year-old daughter. I was proud of the UK then and optimistic for the future, particularly for my children. So, where did it all go wrong, and we got ourselves so lost?

The lesson that I took from getting lost, was that when you first realise that you are lost you don't carry on regardless – the sensible, grown-up thing is to back-track it where you made that first mistake and go on from there. Yes, you have to swallow your pride and admit a mistake, but the cost, time and risk will be so much less to get back on the right track.

So, before we pile yet more problems on a society and economy stretched by Covid, I'd implore our PM to think back of that pivotal moment in 2016 when he had written two contrary points of view on Brexit, and chose his career over the future of the country. I think he took the wrong path.

My experience of getting lost is that it only gets worse if you plough on, trying to convince everyone that you know where you are going, as it slowly dawns on them you are in a mess and haven't got a clue – you either have to back-track to that first mistake, or swallow your pride, wind down the window, admit you are lost and ask for directions...

Nick Roberts
Selly Oak

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Alastair Campbell

Editor-at-Large



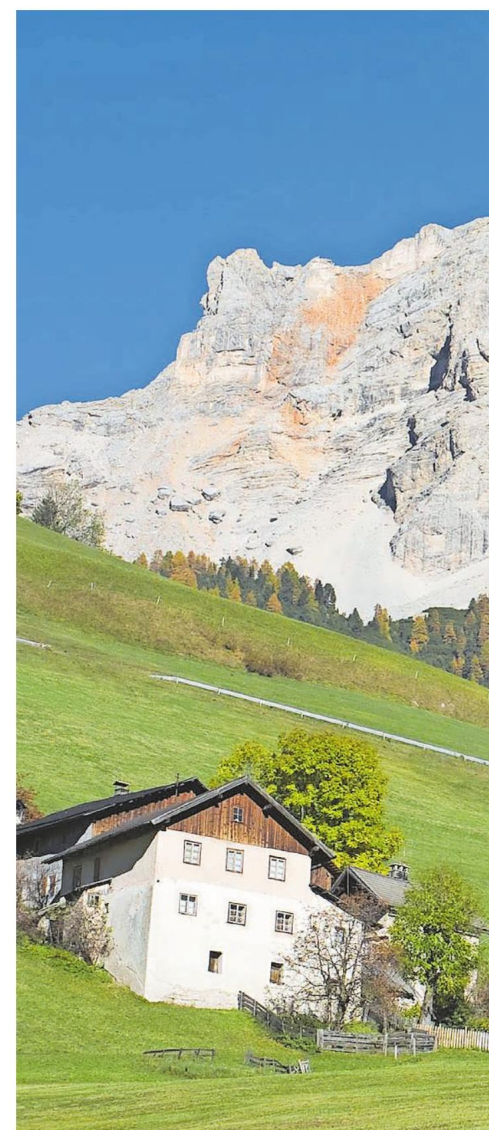
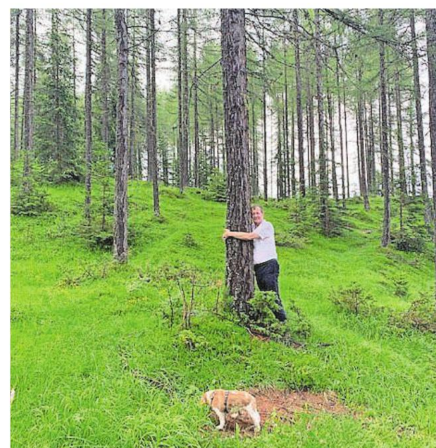
From *Take Back Control* to *Out of Control* in four crazy, chaotic, useless years, under three progressively worse prime ministers.

First David Cameron who at least could look the part but made one horrendous strategic error which is his place in history. Theresa May who tried her best, but her best just wasn't good enough either for the complexities of Brexit or the horrors of her demented party. Now Boris Johnson, the thread in their demise (and eventually his own) who has completed that journey from *Take Back Control* to *He's Lost Control* via a multitude of three-word trolls of the nation, among them *Get Brexit Done*, *Oven Ready Deal*, (RIP) more recently *Whatever it Takes*, (RIP) *Following the Science* (RIP) *Build, Build Build* (aka *Bulls**t Bulls**t Bulls**t*, Roosevelt my arse?) and now *Let's Get Going*. *Let's Get Going!!* For a party that has been in power for a bloody decade.

On the day Michael Gove was announcing the latest taxpayer-funded focus-grouped-to-death blah blah blah, I took him at his word. I got going. To Europe. And I can tell you from experience the best three word slogan to follow right now is *JUST GET AWAY*. I know for many there will be professional, financial, medical or other reasons why they can't just up and go. But for those who can, I cannot recommend it strongly enough. *JUST GET AWAY*.

As we drove towards the tunnel last week, the radio burbled away on the latest Brexit madness, confirmation of the £705 million cost of patrolling border posts the liars promised us we would never need; news that we would have to take out expensive health insurance on future trips to Europe, that firms would have five times more forms to fill in to escape the Brussels red tape that apparently used to strangle them, and this might be the last time we could take the dog without giving soulless Priti Patel and tortured soul Matt Hancock four months' notice. *Dogs hate Brexit*.

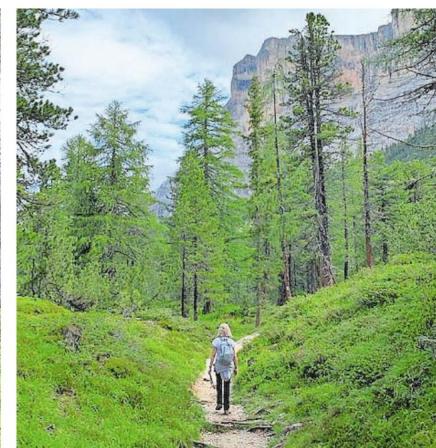
By a strange quirk, we were driving past the turn-off for Ashford when local MP Damian Green came on to say it was "unfair on the people of Ashford" that it



was the chosen site of the gigantic lorry park that is about to disfigure the Garden of England.

That would be the Ashford that voted 59-41 to leave. *Don't Blame Us*. We always knew they were being lied to by the *Take Back Control*.

The tunnel crossing was swift and smooth, and the feeling of getting away was nice, albeit weird after four months of lockdown. The French signage industry was doing a roaring trade in service stations giving instructions on social distancing and coronavirus.



AGENDA

Just get away..

My three words of advice



The Swiss, mind you, went even further – I found a urinal with a corona hygiene slide show playing as you pee! *Whatever it takes!*

I had a work reason to be in Germany, where we spent the first night, but I was not sure about flying or taking the train, and Fiona had the idea of driving, coming along with the dog and spending a few days in the Dolomites afterwards. A plan! However, we are so set in our ways holiday wise – France every summer, Scotland every winter – that we hadn't actually planned a trip like this for ages.

So we asked someone to plan it for us, to *Take The Strain*.

My son Rory's partner runs her own business, which you can check out at Victoria-Payne.com or on their instagram account Curated_Travel. Don't ask me why there are two underscores, I assume someone else got the single underscore first, underlining that the bespoke travel trade was taking off until Covid came along.

She fixes business trips and holidays for often demanding and difficult people like me. Adopting the same approach as Michael Gove and Dominic Cummings take to multi-million pound, non-tendered Covid contracts – Friends and Family First – I gave her the gig, but with a tough brief. Short stay in Germany, longer stay in Italy. Comfort but not poncey luxury. Decent food without it being served by half a dozen over-attentive waiters drooling over an *amuse-bouche* you neither ordered nor wanted. Outdoor pool or nearby open water swimming essential. OMG!!!! views.

As the inventor of the Tree Olympics – check my Twitter account for details – I wanted great trees front and back of my hotel, and Skye wanted amazing walks free from the lead. *Dogs love walkies*. Victoria delivered in style and we arrived to the kind of perks and vouchers I would never think of asking for myself. *Vorsprung durch Upgrades*.

NATURE HEALS ALL: Countryside near San Cassiano, where Alastair Campbell made his European getaway

Photo: Getty Images

Left, a small selection of the editor-at-large's extensive collection of holiday snaps of trees

Photos: Alastair Campbell

Getting to the Black Forest in a day was a schlep for sure but the journey was helped by having Billy Connolly's audiobook, *Made In Scotland*, for company. I wondered at one point whether, in the event of an accident on the Autobahn, I'd have been charged with dangerous driving through laughing so hard my stomach was hurting.

But there was plenty of serious, thought provoking stuff too. *Big Yin Wisdom*. More anon. As for trees and views, see the pictures – more on Twitter – taken from our hotel room in Germany. No, it is not a painting. And the air, my God, the air. So clean, so fresh. *Nature heals all*.

The next day Austria, and a quick stop in the Green Hills of Tyrol. *The Green Hills of Tyrol* is one of the most famous bagpipe tunes ever written by the way, made even more so by Andy Stewart turning it into *A Scottish Soldier*, and being described as a "singing shortbread tin" by Connolly for his troubles – he is clearly into the three word thing too. Then into Switzerland past five miles of lorries parked up like soon they will be in Kent.

Time once more to fulminate at the liars and the charlatans who told us how straightforward it was going to be to *Take Back Control*. Finally to Italy, the Dolomite views even more dramatic than those in the Black Forest. The hotel was

exactly what we wanted. Three fabulous trees at the entrance, hundreds of thousands more within walking distance. Really nice people running it, and though it took a little bit of getting used to they wore masks all the time – as did we in public parts of the hotel other than when eating – it helped to build a sense of security about Covid. So did the hand sanitiser machines on every floor.

Eating out after three months of eating in was weird at first, but nice. As for the walks, if you follow me on social media you will know that I have been mildly obsessed with the beauty of the trees on Hampstead Heath. But this place... oh my God.

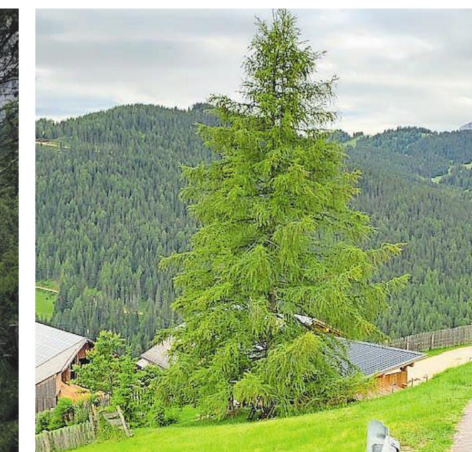
That the hotels are struggling is clear. Ours, the Rosa Alpina in San Cassiano, has 50 bedrooms and the most they had occupied on any of the nights we were there was 22. On our final night, there were just 10 people in the restaurant, us, a Slovenian family of four, an elderly German couple, and a middle aged couple whose incessant amorous advances on each other suggested to me either a late marriage or, more likely, an affair. It was entertaining, if borderline obscene at times.

The hotel staff told us that normally at this time of year they would be at 90-100% occupancy, mainly Americans, Russians and Italians. The winter months are when the Brits tend to come and the locals are obviously desperate for the skiing season to be successful, but realistic that lots of people will be unable or unlikely to travel with the same enthusiasm as before.

We didn't see a single British registration plate once we had left northern France. We met only one British person, a man married to an Italian who had lived in Trieste since 1998. I was reading the German papers most days and the UK barely figured. The Manchester City money story was big. Banksy's exploits on the tube made the German main news. And *Die Welt* had a piece headlined "*Pfund vor dem Rauswurf aus der Geld-élite*", with a sub deck saying investors were viewing Brexit Britain as a *Schwellenländerwährung*... in other words the clowns and charlatans are reducing the great pound to a table of an Emerging Market Currency.

Towards the end of the Billy Connolly book he was on to the kind of reflections that come on you more as you age, and he has the added fact of having Parkinson's, his account of which is both interesting and moving. I had always known him to be more left than right, and more right than wrong, and with a sense of social justice. But I had never had a sense of his political leanings beyond that. He said he had never been one for Scottish independence but Brexit was making him revisit that if he felt an independent Scotland could be part of the EU. Brexit, he said, was a sin and a crime. And he wasn't laughing. Because *Brexit's Not Funny*. A sin and a crime. That is exactly what it is. And great though it was to be away, you find yourself asking constantly "why are we leaving this? For what?" Even the charlatans have stopped pretending there is much good coming out of it.

One thing I do know is that the short break has refuelled my energy and my passion to make sure those who committed the sin and the crime get nailed. So ... *Expose the lies. Nail the liars. Don't accept it. Never give up. We'll be back*.



Tortois^ə.



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MONDAY 27 JULY

Has meritocracy ruined our lives?
A ThinkIn with Daniel Markovits

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Why do toxic cultures thrive in "feminist" companies?

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After Heathrow: what's next for climate change lawyers?

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'This liberal will always defend real liberalism'

**Former Lib Dem leader
TIM FARRON on 'intolerant
liberals' and
others he says are
wrongly adopting
the l-word**



On the *Unherd* website recently, the writer Peter Franklin laid down a challenge: why won't liberals defend liberalism?

He wanted to know why self-professed liberals are not speaking out against the damaging 'cancel culture', where people are vilified for expressing opinions by those who find them offensive. He pointed out that liberal values such as free speech, fairness, equality and reason are under attack, but that 'mainstream' liberals refuse to defend the fundamental right to disagree.

And, he said, staying silent over attacks on extreme views is simply the thin end of the wedge because now the cancel culture is starting to come for people with hitherto mainstream views.

Well, as a liberal to my fingertips, I want to take up the challenge and defend the existence of real liberalism in social and political debate. At first glance, liberalism appears to have won in our society today.

Even members of the Conservative and Labour parties now call themselves liberals. But the increasingly dominant form of liberalism that Peter Franklin is challenging isn't true liberalism at all. Anyone can defend those they agree with. But the moment we block someone who has sneaked some views we dislike into our Twitter bubble, we show ourselves not to be liberal.

At a time of post-Brexit bitterness, with a government that is stoking the fires of populism to appeal to the new voters it won in 2019, the dividing lines in our country have become starker. In our discourse we see liberals condemning those who don't conform as nasty and hateful, whilst the right condemn liberals as fragile snowflakes.

How have we got to this position? In the post-enlightenment, post-modern West, we have rejected the major unifying narratives of faith and history, and are increasingly

encouraged to look inwards for our own truth and values. Our self-worth is found in being true to ourselves and asking others to accept us on our own terms.

My values may be different to yours, but that's OK as long as you don't try to force your values on me. But inevitably, my truth will clash with yours at some point, and I may find your views offensive. If this offence strikes at the heart of my identity, then I am naturally going to feel hurt and threatened by the existence of your views, and you by mine. Then whose opinion takes precedence?

This is why we need to reclaim a genuine liberalism in our debate. Real tolerance and diversity involves fighting for the rights and freedoms of people you don't like or don't agree with – not banning or 'cancelling' them. Simply fighting for your own rights is never enough, because liberalism fights for the rights of those with different views to be heard.

It takes time to listen, seek to understand other perspectives and only then – if both sides maintain their positions – agree to disagree respectfully.

We need to tell a new story about disagreeing well; one about attitude, tone and conduct. It's about how we think about one another, speak to one another, act towards one another, listen to one another.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to do this without causing personal hurt, and I am sympathetic to that pain: there is an incredible intolerance on both sides of so many debates which leads to people feeling that a denunciation of their position is tantamount to erasing them as a person.

But there is a gentler way. Authentic liberalism has its source in Christianity; in its belief in the inherent value of each person and the gift of saving grace. It takes the sting out of the identity politics driving a lot of today's intolerant liberalism, by relieving the immense pressure we put ourselves under to create and sustain our own validity. It reminds us that we do not need to do this all by ourselves and that we are full of significance and dignity, whatever the world tells us.

In discarding Christianity, our society has kicked away the foundations of liberalism. We should not then be surprised when what we call liberalism ceases to be liberal. Instead the so-called 'liberal elites' feel empowered to attack individual liberties such as free speech, and to destroy institutional liberty. Tribal politics set people against one another and politicians resort to dog whistle rhetoric that divides us into 'us and them'.

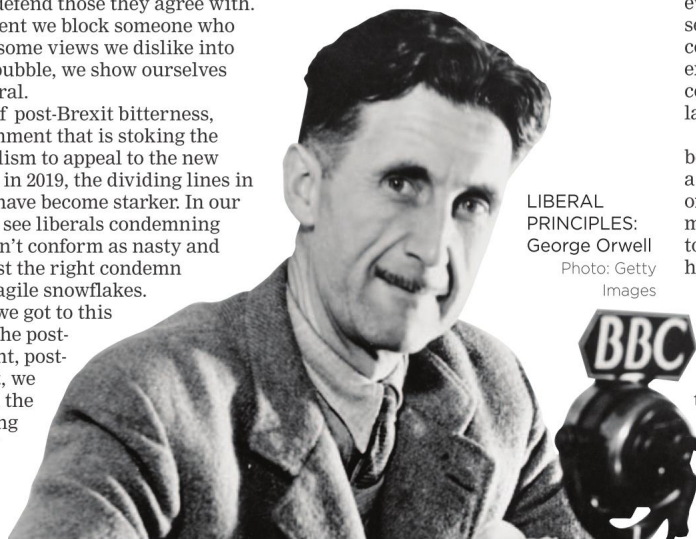
We need to remind ourselves again of the innate worth of each of our fellow humans. The followers of liberalism, as of Christ, should stick up for marginalised groups. When do I hear those of you who claim to be classical liberals (you're not!) standing up on Twitter for the vast majority of asylum seekers who do not commit assault? When do I hear populist commentators, in arguing that 'all lives matter' (of course they do) also acknowledging that black lives need to be particularly noticed and valued at this time because of the pain and disadvantage so many have suffered?

As a liberal politician, I believe that every person should be free to live as they see fit, to hold their beliefs, their conscience, their world view and to express them as they wish. I reject forced conformity whether that comes from the law or from social pressure.

At the heart of a liberal society should be a commitment to uphold that we have a right to offend and a duty to tolerate offence. George Orwell said 'if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear'.

In a pluralistic culture we have a duty to tolerate those we find intolerable. We should stand behind those we find offensive and accept with grace the offence we may feel in return. This is the only way we will redeem liberalism against both the intolerant left and the populist right.

■ Tim Farron is the Liberal Democrat MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale; he was party leader from 2015 to 2017



LIBERAL PRINCIPLES:
George Orwell
Photo: Getty Images

Euronews:

MAN ON TRIAL OVER GERMAN SYNAGOGUE SHOOTING

A 28-year-old German right-wing extremist has gone on trial for a Yom Kippur attack on a synagogue that is considered one of the worst anti-Semitic assaults in the country's post-war history.

Stephan Balliet is alleged to have posted an anti-Semitic essay before carrying out the October 9 attack in the eastern German city of Halle. He broadcast the shooting live on a popular gaming site.

Pleas are not entered in the German system but Balliet did not deny the crime as his trial opened, telling the court he decided to turn to violence in 2015 when Germany opened its doors to more than a million migrants, primarily from Muslim countries.

He is alleged to have repeatedly tried, but failed, to force his way into the synagogue with 52 worshippers inside. Prosecutors allege he then shot and killed a 40-year-old woman in the street outside and a 20-year-old man at a nearby kebab shop as an "appropriate target" with immigrant roots.

The trial comes at a time when anti-Semitic crimes have reached their highest level since Germany started tracking such acts in 2001, amid an overall increase in right-wing extremist crime.

Balliet is charged with 13 crimes including murder and attempted murder, along with bodily harm, incitement and other charges.

NORWEGIAN FIRM BUYS EBAY CLASSIFIEDS BUSINESS

EBay is selling its classifieds business to Norway's Adevin in a deal worth £7.25 billion that will create the world's largest online classifieds group, the companies have said. The US company will get 2.5 billion dollars (£1.97 billion) in cash and become the largest shareholder in Adevin, with a 44% equity stake and a third of the voting rights.

The combined company will have classified ad websites in 20 countries, covering a billion people and receiving about three billion monthly visits.

EBay's classified brands include Gumtree in the UK and Australia, Marktplaats in the Netherlands, Mobile.de in Germany, Vivanuncios in Mexico and Canada's Kijiji.

Adevin owns Leboncoin, France's biggest online classifieds site, and classified businesses in more than a dozen other countries in Europe, North Africa and Latin America.

It was spun off last year from Norwegian media company Schibsted.

FIVE CHILDREN KILLED IN CRASH ON THE 'HIGHWAY OF THE SUN'

Five children have died and four other people were injured after a car crashed in flames on one of France's busiest roads.

The vehicle was carrying nine people, all members of the same family, when it started to spew smoke and caught fire on Monday on the A7 route.

The driver lost control and the vehicle rolled repeatedly before crashing in a field next to the A7, also known as the 'Highway of the Sun'. The road cuts south through the Rhone valley from Lyon to the Mediterranean port city of Marseille.

The family had been heading back to their home on the outskirts of Lyon, authorities said. The injured – three adults and a child – were evacuated to Lyon hospitals.

AGENDA

After Brexit, it's time for Farage's Quitalian Job

"Mussolini can be quite funny," Nigel Farage told a Channel 4 reality show in 2014. "I saw his granddaughter last week... Pretty girl, pretty girl."

These are opinions Farage might want to keep on the QT now he appears to be acting as unofficial advisor to Italy's version of the Brexit Party, which is due to launch this week. Since historians hold Mussolini's 20-year-long reign responsible for the deaths of one million of his countrymen, it's just possible that not all Italians will chuckle along with Nigel at the thought of his memory.

Neither, you'd imagine, would they be too impressed to learn that Hermann Kelly, who worked as a PR man for Farage's EFDD grouping in the European parliament, used to refer to his boss as "Il Duce" ("That's just a bit of fun, isn't it," Nigel told *Politico* in 2018). Or to recall how in 2017, Farage was booed by Italian MEPs for comparing the EU to the mafia, later withdrawing his remark on the grounds of "national sensitivities".

And you cannot see them looking too fondly on Farage's speech in early March at the *Daily Telegraph's* "Heroes of Brexit" event, when he claimed Italy's battle with Covid-19 presented a golden opportunity for Britain: "This awful crisis and the way it is gripping parts of Italy makes a trade deal with the EU easier now than it's ever, ever been. The collapsing Italian economy needs a deal with the UK desperately," he said.

None of this will matter much to Farage fanboy Gianluigi Paragone, the former Five Star Movement senator for who is heading up the new "No Europe for Italy" party – names like "Quitalia" and "Italexit" having been deemed too Anglophone – which is already polling around 7%. He calls Farage "a true

Steve Anglesey



British patriot", hailing him for "bringing the United Kingdom out of the European Union cage... the only one who sent away the technocrats from Brussels".

The former talk show host shares Farage's awkward squad tendencies; public criticism of his party's fading commitment to Euroscepticism saw him kicked out of Five Star earlier this year. Paragone says the pair have discussed "the present and future of a truly sovereign country which, even more so after Brexit, is able to give real answers to citizens in the midst of the post-Covid economic crisis".

It's hardly surprising to hear that Farage is interested in helping out. Along with the Denmark, Poland, the Netherlands and – risibly – Ireland, Italy is a country he's mentioned repeatedly as being prime for the 'next Brexit'.

Until recently, the polls were firmly against him, with the Italian research institute Censis reporting late last year that only 25% believed leaving the EU was a good idea against 62% who thought it a bad idea. But the union's muddled response has been another silver lining from coronavirus for Farage; in April a Tecnè poll put the numbers at an uncomfortable 51%-49% in favour of Remain.

Those polls are expected to move away from Leave after Italy became one of the key beneficiaries of the EU recovery fund



that was finally agreed on Tuesday morning – prime minister Giuseppe Conte says it will receive 28% of the £675 billion available in grants and loans – but Farage has good reason to stay interested. Not only does it look like his lucrative private jet trips to the USA will become far more infrequent after Thursday, November 3, but Italy represents some kind of spiritual homeland for Brexit.

It was after discussions with Five Star co-founder Gianroberto Casaleggio in Milan in January 2015 that Farage resolved to make Facebook and data the key battlegrounds for pro-Leave campaigning, telling the political scientists Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo: "If I was starting UKIP today would I spend 20 years speaking to people in village halls or would I base it on the [Five Star co-founder Beppe] Grillo model? I know exactly what I would do."

Casaleggio's methods attracted the eye of Arron Banks too, making the Milan

FARAGE FANBOY: "No Europe for Italy" party leader Gianluigi Paragone

Photo: Getty Images

meeting a fatal first step on the road to Leave just 17 months on. The Brexit Party, which toppled Theresa May and appears to have forced Britain into the kind of Brexit that in 2016 existed only in the wildest dreams of the wildest Leavers, was founded in Five Star's image.

Banks can now be found working for crotchety right-winger Winston Peters in his flagging New Zealand general election campaign against hugely popular incumbent PM Jacinda Ardern, telling website *Newshub Nation* this week that he is determined to deliver "Winston on steroids... a happy warrior".

Far cry, isn't it, from the days after Barack Obama delivered his pro-Remain "Get to the back of the queue" speech in March 2016? Back then, Banks' organisation responded with a "Back Off, Barack!" petition and Farage warned him to "butt out" of the Brexit debate.

Honestly, the cheek of these foreigners trying to interfere in the democratic process of other countries...

STEVE'S SELECTION

ALOK SHARMA

Without a hint of irony or self-awareness, the business minister tweeted: "Seamless trade is vital for our economy, boosting business, supporting jobs, and ensuring consumers get the best deal. Our Internal Market plans will make sure it's business as usual, with trade continuing to flow between all four nations of the UK."

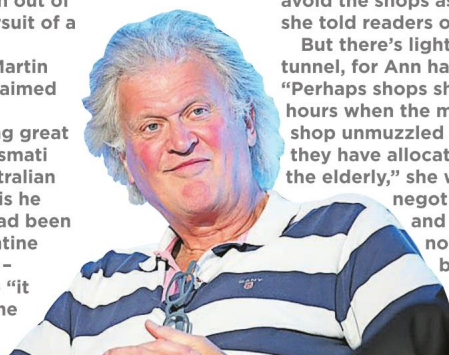
While it's good to hear that there will be no impediment on the movement of lambswool to Land's End and oats to John o'Groats, how exactly does "seamless trade is vital for our economy" square with the impending tariffs-and-checks Brexit Sharma and his colleagues are about to inflict on "all four nations of the UK", even though two of them didn't even vote Leave in the first place?

TIM MARTIN

The man who looked in need of a post-lockdown haircut before lockdown was even invented has been ranting about the media in the pages of his pub chain's in-house magazine *Wetherspoon News*. "The press often, but not always, bends the truth out of any recognisable shape, in pursuit of a story," he wrote.

The same might be said of Martin himself, who has repeatedly claimed that massive EU tariffs were preventing Britons from getting great deals on Brazilian oranges, Basmati rice from Bangladesh and Australian wines. When challenged on this he admitted some of his claims had been incorrect but blamed a "Byzantine moving feast of complexities" – which sounds suspiciously like "it was too difficult to work out the truth!"

RANTER: Tim Martin Photo: PA



ANN WIDDECOMBE

The former Tory MP and Brexit Party MEP has joined the list of libertarians who have reacted to Boris Johnson's approval for face coverings by, erm, covering their faces in horror. "I suspect that mask-haters will, as will I, avoid the shops as much as possible," she told readers of the *Daily Express*.

But there's light at the end of the tunnel, for Ann has had a BIG IDEA. "Perhaps shops should allow certain hours when the mask dissenters can shop unmuzzled in the same way as they have allocated special times to the elderly," she wrote. If we can now negotiate with Covid-19 and persuade the virus not to be contagious between the hours of, say, 8am-9am, I think she is on to a winner.

THE INNOCENT

"It was all a hoax, apologies are due," declared Nigel Farage. "After all the hysteria that Brexit was fixed by the Russians... turns out it wasn't. A lot of humble pie to be eaten by conspiracy theory Remoaners today," crowed former MEP Martin Daubney. "It shows that this whole conspiracy theory was a load of old rubbish," insisted *Westmonster* hack Michael Heaver.

Of course the Russia report says nothing of the sort, with the word 'Brexit' only mentioned twice. But now there won't be any investigation into Russian involvement in the 2016 referendum because the Russia report didn't uncover any Russian involvement in the 2016 referendum largely because the Russia report committee didn't investigate Russian involvement in the 2016 referendum in the first place. Move along now, nothing to see here...

EXPERTISE

THE UNFRIENDLY GAMES



Forty years ago this summer, the main event at the Moscow Olympics was an almighty clash between sport and politics.

MICK O'HARE considers which was the winner



When Allan Wells dipped desperately for the line in the 100 metres final at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games he wasn't sure he'd won. He was in lane eight, right on the outside of the track. His nearest rival, Silvio Leonard

CONTROVERSIAL: Britain's Allan Wells, left, dips to win 100m gold from Cuba's Silvio Leonard at the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games

Photo: Getty Images

of Cuba, was far away in lane one. Wells tried to glimpse to the left as they crossed the line almost simultaneously but he couldn't tell.

His wife and coach Margot, up in the grandstand, peering through her fingers, had to wait agonising seconds before the scoreboard confirmed the result. The Scot had grabbed gold by millimetres, the first Briton to win the event since Harold Abrahams of *Chariots of Fire* fame in Paris in 1924.

Wells' winning time of 10.25 seconds would not have ranked him in the year's top 20, which meant that commentators were suddenly talking about the sprinters who weren't there: the rapidly emerging Caribbean athletes, the Canadians and West Germans, but most of all the Americans who were expected to dominate.

All were missing because the previous December the Soviet Union, host of the 1980 Olympics, had invaded neighbouring Afghanistan.

Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev's

intention was to reinstate the Marxist-Leninist Afghan government of Babrak Karmal under threat from Muslim and anti-communist insurgents.

Naively, in hindsight, the Soviets expected little international condemnation, considering the occupation a personal matter on their own doorstep. But the administration of US president Jimmy Carter was already covertly backing the insurgents throughout 1979 and, with the arrival of 30,000 Soviet troops, another Cold War proxy conflict kicked off.

The notion of a boycott had been rumbling around western capitals for a while, along with talk of other sanctions, but it began to morph into somatic form when prominent Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov was arrested after protesting against the invasion.

His appeal for nations to boycott the games offered the Carter administration an opportunity to win domestic kudos by flexing its muscle on the international stage amid the ongoing debacle of the

Iran hostage crisis – a crisis that would go from bad to worse in April when US forces botched a rescue mission to free the 52 Americans held in their embassy in Tehran.

Carter's foreign policy humiliation was mounting, so in an attempt to recoup waning support in what was a presidential election year (an election he would lose), he announced that if Soviet forces did not withdraw from Afghanistan by February 20, the US would boycott the July games. Congress overwhelmingly backed him but as the *Washington Post* noted: "The Soviet Union has been treating this Olympiad as one of the great events of their modern history," and unsurprisingly they refused to accede to the ultimatum. In response Carter, egged on by vice president Walter Mondale and hardline national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, urged allies around the world to follow his lead.

EXPERTISE



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The next few weeks dissolved into a “will they? won’t they?” stand-off between national Olympic committees, individual sports bodies, politicised athletes and their keep-politics-out-of-sport counterparts.

Lord Killanin, the Irish president of the International Olympic Committee, desperately attempted to stave off the boycott. He was fearful for the very future of the games and contended the athletes were being treated as geopolitical pawns. The IOC declared its “belief that boycotting a sporting event is an improper way of trying to obtain a political end and that the real victims of any such action are the sportsmen and women”.

But while Killanin was demanding the games go ahead, Carter began to lean heavily on his allies in NATO and elsewhere. He even sent out former world heavyweight champion and Olympic gold medalist boxer Muhammad Ali to tour Africa as his diplomatic envoy. Initially Ali called himself “the black Henry Kissinger” but there was an inauspicious outcome.

He returned with his opinion changed in favour of no boycott – “at best, it was ill-conceived; at worst, a diplomatic disaster,” wrote Ali biographer Thomas Hauser.

In Britain, the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, elected the previous year and promising among other things patriotic resurgence, broadly supported Carter’s stance.

The US president hoped if Britain came on board the rest of western Europe would take note. Sebastian Coe, the world record-holding middle-distance runner whose forthcoming track confrontations against his equally-decorated countryman Steve Ovett were expected to provide Moscow’s *pièce de résistance*, recounts the athletes’ tension in the months before the games.

“The uncertainly played on us all,” he says, “and while I understood the anger at the invasion and knew however hard you tried, politics and sport could not be kept apart, it was unfair athletes were being used. It was hypocritical and weak, the politicians should resolve issues themselves.”

British athletes wrote a letter to

FLASHPOINT:
1 Demonstrators in Toronto protest at the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and call for a Canadian boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow

2 Athletes negotiate a water hazard during the 3,000m steeplechase at the Games

Photos: Getty Images

Thatcher stating: “We make it clear we do not support Soviet foreign policy but we are not prepared to preside over the destruction of the Olympic movement.” She remained unmoved.

In the end parliament voted to boycott, but the British Olympic Committee would not be bowed. Despite vague threats of the government withholding athletes’ passports the committee deemed it was up to individual national sports bodies to choose whether to compete. Luckily for Coe, Ovett and Wells, track and field opted to attend, with only hockey, yachting and equestrian sports staying away.

However, they would be required to compete under the Olympic rather than the Union flag. “I think we had public backing,” says Coe, although he recalls one photograph of departing athletes under the headline “Moscow’s latest weapon”.

By now Carter’s faux belligerence – and his arbitrary February deadline – was pasting him into a corner. And when the Winter Olympics, held in the US at Lake Placid, threw up the ‘Miracle on Ice’ – the United States ice hockey team beating the all-conquering Soviet Union



EXPERTISE



and winning gold – public opinion began to turn.

Sport was exciting. Maybe it was better to go to Moscow and whop the Reds on their own soil. US four-time discus gold-medallist Al Oerter concurred: “The only way to compete against Moscow is to stuff it down their throats in their own backyard.”

Public sympathy for the athletes was growing. “I don’t like having my livelihood wasted,” said marathon runner Garry Bjorklund. Others were more openly political. Fellow distance runner Carl Hatfield pointed out “the Olympics is one of the few events that’s conflict-free. Take that away and you’re further down that continuum that leads to war”.

Because the constitution of the IOC demanded that national committees, not governments, were in charge of sending teams to Olympic games, at one stage it appeared the US Olympic Committee might defy Carter as the British had defied the Thatcher government.

In May, 18 European national Olympic committees jointly announced their intention to defend the ideals of the Olympic movement and declared they



had a “duty to permit participation in the Games”.

With other western nations following suit, it looked like embarrassment was looming for the president. In the end, after legal attempts to force the US committee to withdraw failed, it took an impassioned speech, appealing to the delegates’ “patriotism” and demanding the athletes not “defy the highest elected office in the land” from William Simon, a former treasury secretary under president Richard Nixon who had served on the Olympic committee, to force USOC members to support the boycott. It was the hollowest of victories. One delegate remarked regretfully that it was “either that or being perceived to support the Soviet Union. And I resent that.” Anti-communist hawk Brzezinski retorted that dissenting athletes were not the ones facing down the tanks of the Soviet aggressors.

Ultimately, while most of the western sporting powerhouses defied Carter, albeit with many competing under the Olympic flag rather their own, some key nations did join the boycott including West Germany, even after chancellor Helmut Schmidt had complained earlier

OPPOSITION:
3 American spectators protest against the USSR’s invasion of Afghanistan at the opening ceremony for the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, USA

4 Soviet tanks roll into Kabul, Afghanistan, in December 1979
Photos: Getty Images

that the US allies should not “simply do as they are told”.

His country was followed by Japan, Canada and Argentina while a number of non-US aligned Islamic states joined in protest against the oppression of religion by the Soviet/ Afghan government.

So did it work? Carter may have had one eye on the 1976 boycott by mainly African nations of the Montreal games. They objected to the inclusion of New Zealand, whose rugby union squad had toured South Africa in defiance of the informal sporting embargo on playing teams representing the apartheid regime.

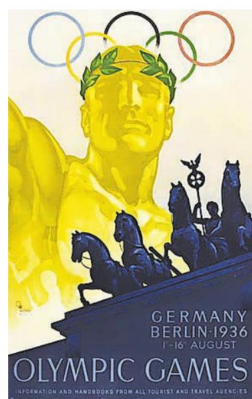
While New Zealand were not excluded (hence the boycott) it did raise awareness of widespread opposition to apartheid and eventually – although not until after more protests over a reciprocal incoming South African tour to New Zealand – led to the latter joining the rest of the world in opposing apartheid through sport.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the human rights campaigner, called it “the sanction that hurt supporters of apartheid most”.

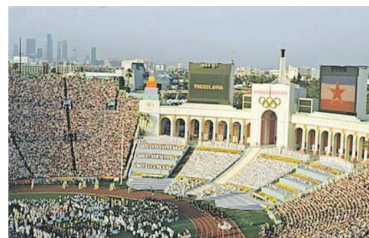
EXPERTISE

TIMELINE OF TROUBLE: A HISTORY OF OLYMPIC BOYCOTTS

There have been seven boycotts of the Summer Olympics since the modern games were first staged in Athens in 1896. The first might have been in 1908 as some Irish athletes threatened not to take part when they were included in the United Kingdom team, but eventually the teams were split into Great Britain and Ireland and the boycott was called off. It wouldn't be the last time politics put its foot in the door at the Games – whether it was righteous causes or petty bickering, the Olympics have oft been used to further somebody else's point of view.



1936 Berlin
The full atrocities of Nazism were yet to be unleashed, but countries such as Britain, France and the United States considered not attending and thus denying Adolf Hitler the propaganda he desired. In the end they sent teams but individual Jewish athletes boycotted the games.

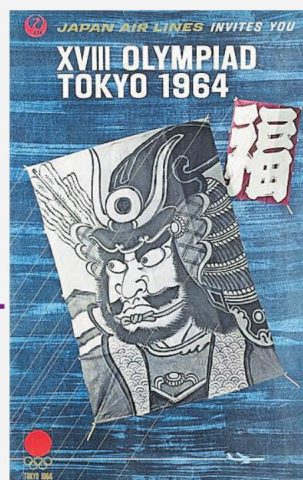


1984 Los Angeles
A tit-for-tat boycott by Soviet-aligned eastern bloc nations in retaliation for 1980, ostensibly over security concerns and fear of “anti-communist hysteria” in the US. Cuba and Iran also refused invitations citing “political differences” with the US government.

1988 Seoul
North Korea declined to attend the games in South Korea for political reasons still apparent today and won backing from Cuba, Nicaragua, Ethiopia and Madagascar.



1956 Melbourne
Notable for provoking three separate boycotts. It was the first games the Soviet Union chose to attend but it came only weeks after that country's invasion of Hungary (who defeated the USSR water polo team at the games in a notoriously brutal, politically-charged encounter known as the Blood in the Water match), prompting a boycott from the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon did not attend in protest at the French-British-Israeli attempt to annex the Suez Canal, while China boycotted the games over Taiwan's inclusion.



1980 Moscow
Initiated by the US in protest against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan



1964 Tokyo
China, Indonesia and North Korea stayed at home after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided that athletes who had competed in the rival games – set up by Indonesia as a counter to the Olympics – of the New Emerging Forces in 1963 would not be welcome.



1976 Montreal
The first mass boycott – 29 mainly African nations elected not to attend when the IOC refused to ban New Zealand from the games. The latter's rugby union team had toured apartheid South Africa earlier that year in defiance of a sporting embargo. New Zealand won four medals, two of which were gold – one for the men's hockey team and one for John Walker in the 1,500m.

From page 23

It might have been this partially successful outcome and the publicity it generated that led Carter to his injudicious position. In some ways he was initially outwardly more successful – 65 nations joined the United States in boycotting Moscow, 36 more than in 1976. However, a central tenet of the IOC is to “endeavour to place sport at the service of humanity and thereby to promote peace,” and Carter banked on nations choosing to ignore this message, seemingly unaware of the significance of each country's independent national Olympic committee and their adherence to the ideal.

Any patriotic burst from pulling out was almost certain to be short-lived – once the games were under way the public became even more aware that the only group paying a price was the competitors themselves.

A group of American athletes were unsuccessful in suing the government over the damage to their careers but they were successful in sowing resentment of the boycott among the American people.

Carter eventually become conscious of this, fearing he might become the man who “killed the Olympics”.

Even politicians who outwardly supported the boycott were aware of its drawbacks. Ted Kennedy, the Massachusetts senator, confirmed his support, but added: “I want to make clear it is not an effective substitute for foreign policy.” And that criticism applied as much to the effect the unwelcome pressure Carter brought to bear on his allies had created, as the repercussions or otherwise it had on Soviet foreign policy.

As Coe, who would himself go on to chair the organising committee for the 2012 Olympics in London, notes: “In historical terms the boycott must be counted as a failure, but in other ways the Olympic movement is more aware of the need for unity, more determined to resist outside political pressure.”

Nonetheless, the US-led 1980 action would still lead directly to the eastern bloc's retaliatory boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles games – an unintended legacy of Carter's actions. “Don't mix sport and politics” runs the old adage.

Carter, his focus distracted by dwindling prospects of a second term in

office, failed to take heed. The Olympics, in any case, proved more resilient than he could have imagined. And even without the participation of 65 nations, 36 world records were set in Moscow.

But of course, the greatest measure of the boycott's failure was that Carter had hoped to express the opprobrium of the international community, and to force the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan. Yet it would be 10 years – or two more Olympiads – before they did, leaving behind a ravaged and religiously radicalised nation.

Killanin had this to say of Carter: “Whatever the rights and wrongs of Afghanistan, the judgment of one man scrambling for his political life in the American presidential election campaign... turned the Olympic arena into [a] battleground.” He never forgave the US president.

And for Allan Wells there was vindication. For sceptics who believed he would not have taken gold had the best Americans been in Moscow, the Scot had the perfect riposte. Two weeks after Moscow he accepted the challenge to race them at an invitation meeting in Koblenz. He beat them all.

UNIQUE CEREMONY

With many athletes competing under the Olympic flag, rather than that of their own nation, the cycling velodrome saw the only medal ceremony in Olympic history to display three Olympic flags for the individual pursuit gold, silver and bronze winners: Robert Dill-Bundi of Switzerland, Alain Bondue of France and Hans-Henrik Oersted of Denmark.



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EXPERTISE

SLEEPWALKING TOWARDS UNION'S

A new survey suggests most Tory MPs are not expecting any ruptures in the Union over the next decade.

DR ALAN WAGER
reports



It is difficult to think of an area of British politics as sensitive to the vagaries of opinion poll research as the debate over Scottish independence. The ritual has begun to look something like this: an opinion poll, reported as a shock to the system, shows the real possibility of independence.

Westminster is, supposedly, awakened from its stupor. A serious but temporary discussion about the existential threat to the union takes place. Then, normality resumes.

The most famous example, of course, was the YouGov poll a fortnight out from the referendum in 2014, which showed a narrow Yes lead.

And we saw the latest example of this a couple of weekends ago, as a Panelbase poll for the *Sunday Times* saw the campaign for independence register its highest ever support with the pollster at 54%.

At the core of this ritual is the idea that the break-up of the United Kingdom is overlooked and under-priced by politicians in Westminster.

Yet, in truth, the opposite may well be the case: many MPs could well be aware that a second IndyRef and Scottish independence is increasingly likely. They are just not sure what it exactly they can do about it.

To test this and wider attitudes to the union in Westminster, back in January – in a pre-Covid-19 age – at the UK in a Changing Europe we worked with Ipsos

Mori to ask a representative survey of MPs in the new parliament some questions about the future of the union.

As the fantastic Institute for Government graph on this page shows, at the start of the year independence had polling consistently on a knife-edge, between 49% and 51%, for the best part of a year.

We asked three questions: whether it was likely Scotland or Wales would vote to become an independent country within the next decade, and whether it is likely that Northern Ireland will vote to join the Republic by 2030.

The results demonstrate a clear party split: the Conservative Party in parliament, at least at the start of the year, remained confident in its ability to keep the union intact. Just 10% of Conservative MPs thought Scottish independence was likely in the next decade.

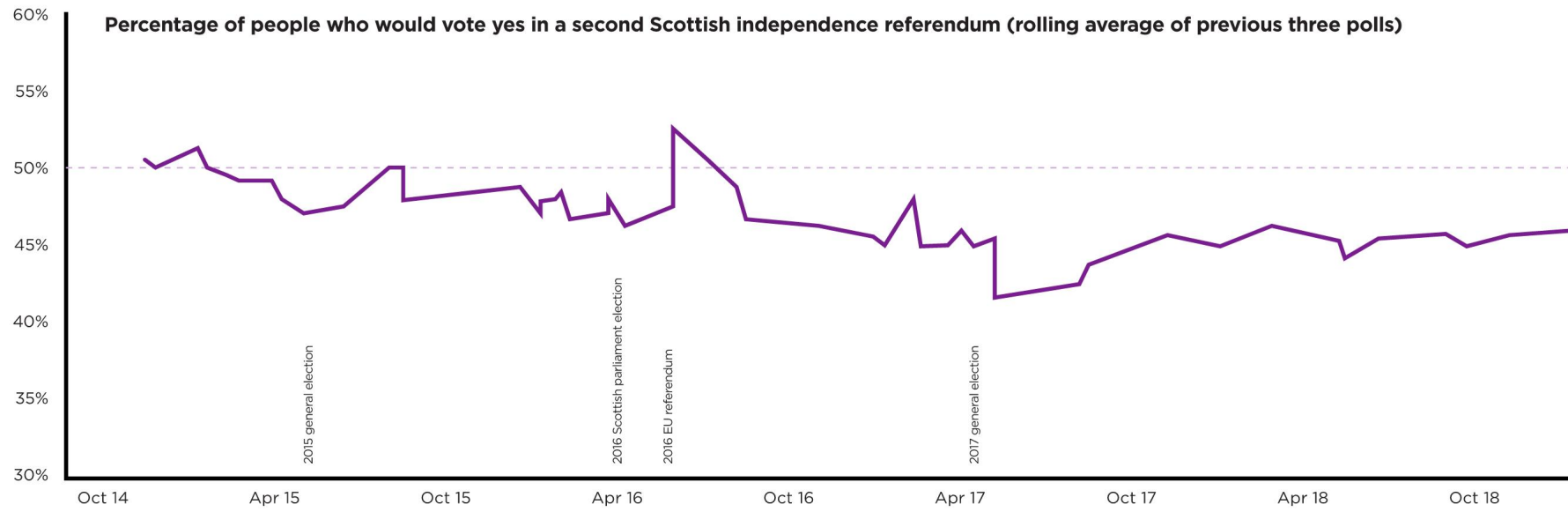
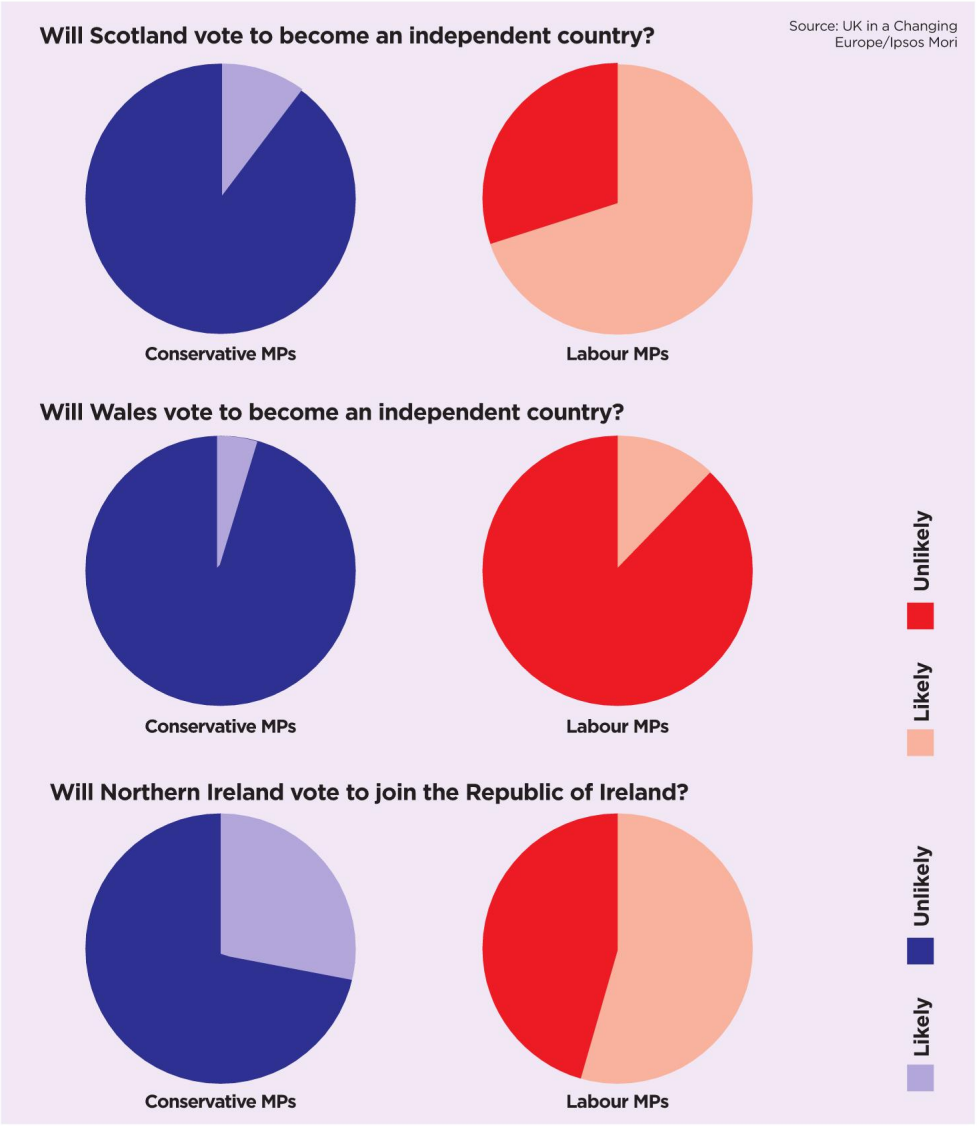
This was a clear disjunction between the expectations of the party that governs the UK, and the fact that support for independence had been precipitously on the rise since 2017.

The question is whether the sharp further increase following the handling of this crisis has woken up any more Conservative MPs.

The recent creation of a new Union Policy Implementation cabinet committee suggests the party may be increasingly alive to the fact that the implementation of Brexit – and the enforcement of a UK-wide internal market – is likely to bring a new set of political opportunities for an emboldened Nicola Sturgeon.

In contrast, by more than a two to one margin – 68% to 32% – Labour MPs thought the independence movement was more likely than not to win a referendum by 2030. The Scottish question within the Labour party is beginning to take on an air of weary resignation.

Where there was slightly greater cross-



END?

party agreement was on expectations around Irish unification. More than a quarter of Conservative MPs see this as likely (28%), and just over half of Labour MPs (53%).

The simple fact that the possibility of a unification referendum in the near future in Northern Ireland is taken seriously by a significant proportion of both main parties in Westminster would have been difficult to imagine prior to Brexit.

And certainly, recent analysis of the latest Northern Ireland Life and Times survey – fieldwork conducted between September 2019 and the start of February 2020 – shows that the expectation of Irish unification has risen among the Republican community in Northern Ireland.

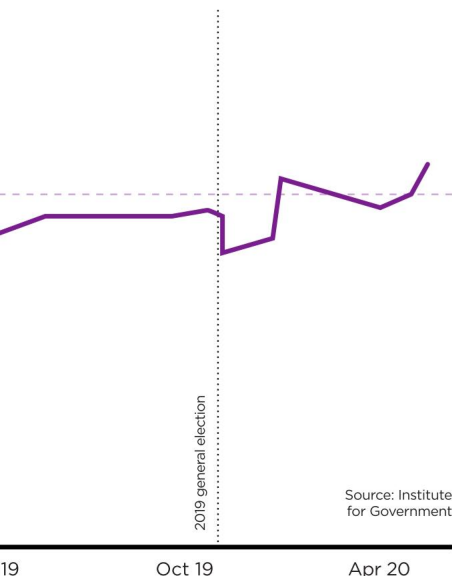
What our survey also shows is that the possibility of a unification referendum in the near future in Northern Ireland – a legal obligation under the Good Friday Agreement, if a majority for a united Ireland appears likely – is taken seriously by a significant proportion of both main parties in Westminster.

Indeed, a key takeaway from our survey is that a substantial minority of MPs, and a majority of Labour MPs, are alive to the real possibility of further constitutional rupture over the next decade.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of Conservative MPs may be sleepwalking into a decade marked by major constitutional ruptures.

Perhaps the key lesson from the referendums of 2014 and 2016 – if you are about to enter into an existential constitutional referendum against an insurgent with their tails up, you had better come prepared with a plan – does not appear to have been learned by the Conservative (and don't forget Unionist) Party.

■ Dr Alan Wager is a research associate at the UK in a Changing Europe, which first published this article



POST-BREXIT SETTLEMENT THAT DEEPENS DIVISIONS

Recently published plans on how the UK's 'internal market' will work after Brexit hint at further tensions ahead, suggests **NICOLA McEWEN**



When Theresa May first set out her Brexit objectives at Lancaster House in January 2017, one of her top priorities was "to strengthen the precious union", by ensuring that "as we leave the European Union – no new barriers to living and doing business within our own Union are created".

The recent publication of a UK government white paper gives the clearest indication yet of how her successor plans to uphold 'the UK internal market'.

Although the details are unusually sketchy for a white paper, the proposals could have a profound effect on devolution.

They could place considerable constraints on the capacity of the devolved institutions to pursue some of the distinctive policy goals they have been able to take up hitherto, including those that were permissible within EU internal market regulations.

Once the transition period ends, the UK and devolved governments will no longer be obliged to conform to EU regulations.

Each will be free to develop new regulations within their areas of competence, subject to any level playing field commitments made in a UK-EU deal.

That opens up the possibility of greater policy divergence that, in principle, might disrupt trade across the UK's internal borders.

To guard against this possibility, the white paper proposes a Market Access Commitment. This will introduce in primary legislation both a principle of mutual recognition and a principle of non-discrimination to "guarantee the continued right of all UK companies to trade unhindered in every part of the UK".

Mutual recognition ensures that goods or services that satisfy regulatory standards in one part of the UK are eligible to enter the market anywhere in the UK.

Non-discrimination prevents UK businesses or individuals trading across the UK's internal borders from being treated differently from local traders, either directly on the grounds of residence or geographical origin.

So, if the Scottish parliament decided to pass a law to limit the sugar content of goods produced in Scotland to tackle the problem of obesity, it could not impose those standards on goods coming into Scotland from other parts of the UK, nor could it prevent those goods from

entering the Scottish market, provided these satisfy regulations set anywhere in the UK.

Such a law may also be challenged by Scottish producers as an unnecessary barrier to their ability to trade freely across the UK.

There are many uncertainties in the proposals. The devolved governments had been concerned that an independent regulatory body, potentially with little understanding of devolution, could be tasked with enforcing UK internal market rules.

The white paper seems to rule this out. That leaves open the issue as to how the Market Access Commitment will be enforced.

The implication is that businesses and consumers will be empowered to challenge any law or action that is perceived to impede their ability to engage in 'frictionless trade' in any part of the UK.

The legislation could go even further, amending the devolution settlements, either to introduce a constraint that prevents laws from being passed that are incompatible with UK internal market law, or that empower the Secretary of State to prevent actions by the devolved institutions on grounds of incompatibility with the internal market.

Any of these enforcement mechanisms could represent a significant new constraint on devolved competence and would be met with considerable resistance.

In theory, the internal market principles would affect all four administrations. In practice, they will inevitably have an asymmetrical effect.

The paper acknowledges that traders in Northern Ireland, and goods entering that market, will have to comply with EU rules, as required by the Northern Ireland protocol.

Moreover, the principle of parliamentary sovereignty means that the Westminster parliament cannot bind itself, and so its autonomy to make laws will not face the constraints that may be placed on the devolved institutions.

The sheer size of the English economy and population relative to the others is also likely to give English businesses and consumers, and the UK government making policies for England, considerably greater influence in determining regulatory standards across the UK.

No government in any part of the UK would seek to impose unnecessary barriers to trade and mobility. But who gets to determine the necessity, or otherwise, of distinctive regulations?

When the Scottish parliament passed legislation to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol, the disruption to trade in alcohol resulting from the policy was defended as a legitimate and proportionate means of tackling adverse health and social effects of alcohol abuse.

After lengthy legal challenges led by the Scotch Whisky Association, the Supreme Court sided with the Scottish government.

But it is not at all clear that public health, environmental or any other policy goals will be justifiable exemptions from UK internal market principles. The white paper seems to place the objective of frictionless trade above all other policy ambitions.

New governance arrangements are envisaged, building on existing intergovernmental relations (IGR), "ensuring a strong basis for political decision-making, oversight, and dialogue in relation to the Internal Market". There is no detail at all about what these intergovernmental processes would entail.

The Joint Review of IGR, initiated by the four administrations in March 2018, has struggled to produce any recommendations to address the evident weaknesses in intergovernmental machinery or agree mechanisms for resolving dispute.

It is difficult to foresee agreement on shared governance arrangements for an internal market if its principles are designed and imposed by the UK government.

UK internal market legislation will affect devolved competences, and so under the Sewel convention, the consent of the devolved legislatures will be sought. That consent is unlikely to be secured. Will that matter? Recent experience suggests not.

In other Brexit-related legislation, the UK government has demonstrated its willingness to press ahead despite devolved institutions withholding consent. Setting aside the Sewel convention again would further undermine one of the core principles of UK devolution.

Without cooperation, consent and co-decision built into the development and governance of a UK internal market, further tensions between the UK and devolved institutions are inevitable. And for what?

The research in the annex to the white paper makes clear that, in comparison to trade between EU member states, between the Nordic states and within European federal states such as Germany, the UK is already highly integrated and the costs associated with cross-border trade are very low.

This suggests that EU regulations have not been the only factor supporting UK market integration. By using a legislative sledgehammer to crack a hypothetical nut, these measures are unlikely restore the trust between the UK and devolved governments that the Brexit process has eroded.

Instead, they may deepen the fractures that threaten the very Union the UK government is seeking to strengthen.

■ Nicola McEwen is a professor of territorial politics, a co-director of the Centre on Constitutional at the University of Edinburgh, and senior fellow at the UK in a Changing Europe, which also published this article

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EXPERTISE

TALE OF TWO CITIES



The contrast between Naples' magnificent setting and its darker side means the city continues to captivate, says
RUTH GLYNN



Overlooking sparkling sea and overshadowed by Mount Vesuvius, the Italian city of Naples is a popular and evocative setting in popular culture.

Acclaimed HBO series *My Brilliant Friend*, an adaptation of Elena Ferrante's first two Neapolitan novels, returned to UK screens for its second series this summer. Its popularity follows that of Sky Atlantic's *Gomorrah*. This series, also set in Naples, is inspired by author Roberto Saviano's exposé of the local criminal organisation, the Camorra.

The adaptation of these works follows the enormous commercial success of

CITY OF DRAMA:
1 The Italian Air Force aerobatic unit, Frecce Tricolori (Tricolor Arrows) perform over the Gulf of Naples

Photo: Getty Images

2 Margherita Mazzucco as Elena Greco in the HBO adaptation of Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend*

Photo: HBO

Ferrante's and Saviano's books within Italy and beyond. But they are also testament to the enduring appeal of Naples as a source of inspiration and as a brand that sells – and sells well – on the world stage.

In the 18th century, the city was a stop on the Grand Tour, the traditional trip around Europe taken by young and wealthy northern Europeans and Americans. These visitors were attracted by tales of Naples' extraordinary beauty and by the nearby wonders of Vesuvius and Pompeii. They were greeted on arrival by what has been described as a "demographic monster": a frenetic and rapidly-expanding city, often experienced as an assault on the senses.

The contrast between the magnificence of the city's setting and the squalor of its rowdy underclass contributed to Naples' proverbial reputation as a "paradise inhabited by devils".

It also resulted in the widespread portrayal of Naples as an exotic and often incomprehensible place, simultaneously seductive, thrilling and bewildering.

That ambiguity is also present in Italian attitudes to the city.

On one hand, since Italy was unified in

1861, Naples has been held up as the epitome of all things Italian. More often, though, it is seen as a thorn in the side of the modern nation-state.

In the late 19th century, the Italian south – and Naples in particular – was viewed by its northern rulers as uncivilised and barbaric.

Over the course of the 20th century, however, Naples became celebrated as the cradle of Italian popular culture. According to media scholar Peppino Ortaleva, Naples became to "Italian popular culture what the New Orleans-Nashville axis is to US culture".

The city was a hotspot for talent and experimentation.

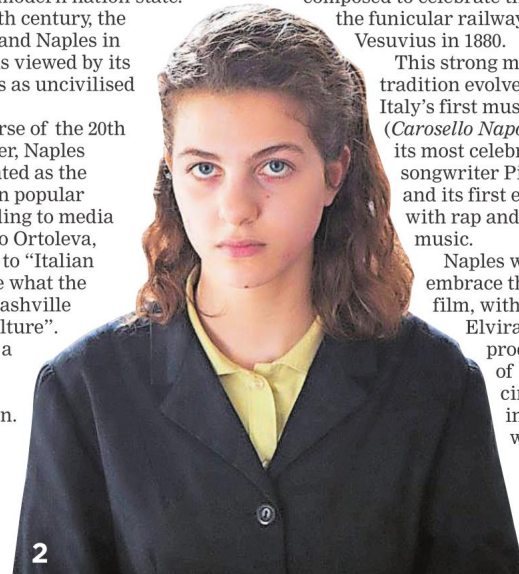
Naples has a long musical history: its songs from the 19th century are still popular today.

The famous 'O sole mio, sung in Neapolitan dialect, was written in 1898. Another song, *Funiculì, funiculà*, was composed to celebrate the opening of the funicular railway on Mount Vesuvius in 1880.

This strong musical tradition evolved to produce Italy's first musical film (*Carosello Napoletano*, 1953), its most celebrated singer-songwriter Pino Daniele, and its first experiments with rap and world music.

Naples was quick to embrace the advent of film, with director Elvira Notari producing some of early cinema's most intriguing work.

The city emerged as a major source of performing talent,



EXPERTISE

POPULISTS UNMASKED BY COVID PANDEMIC

Europe's far right parties have failed to capitalise on coronavirus, which has exposed their empty strategies, says **GEORGIOS SAMARAS**



In recent years, Europe's far right parties have capitalised on crises to build their support bases. Many have made it to positions of power as a result. The financial crisis, the refugee crisis and the debate around climate change have all provided opportunities to harness uncertainty and resentment for political purposes. However, early signs suggest these groups have not had the same success during the pandemic. For now, at least, incumbent governments seem to be in control.

In Germany, the far-right AfD openly embraced conspiracy theories. Its members claimed Angela Merkel's lockdown measures were unnecessary. This initially gained traction among a public trying to adapt to a strange new way of life. But the AfD were quickly seen to have painted themselves into a corner when it became clear that Germany's lockdown was producing the desired effect and infections were dropping.

The AfD has lost a significant amount of support during the pandemic, sliding from around 15% approval in pre-coronavirus polls to something more like 9% now.

Meanwhile, in Italy, Matteo Salvini, leader of the League party, has found it very hard to hold the attention of the national media – a new experience for him. The League's messaging has been confusing. In late February, it called for the partially locked down region of Lombardy to be reopened but then demanded a full lockdown. The news website *Politico's* analysis of opinion polling shows that the League's popularity is down 11% from last summer.

The National Rally in France has also seen better days. Party leader Marine Le Pen asserted that it makes sense to ask if Covid-19 was made in a lab. A recent poll found that 40% of National Rally voters believe that the virus was intentionally designed in a laboratory. Support for Le Pen's party

appears to have flatlined during the pandemic.

In Greece, the leader of a new far right group called Greek Solution is under investigation by the Supreme Court for producing TV commercials advertising balms that "effectively protect people from coronavirus". Vox in Spain has also failed to advance in polls, while mainstream parties in the country have enjoyed a boost.

In spite of the far right's continuous attempts to cause further instability during the pandemic, most European countries have rallied around their governments. Even mainstream opposition parties have struggled to make an impact.

Germans have been supportive of Merkel's evidence-based approach, while both France's Emmanuel Macron and Italy's Giuseppe Conte have seen their approval ratings climb. Greece's success at controlling the virus so far has not gone unnoticed either. It's hard for opposition parties of any kind to gain traction when the current government has managed to keep total infections to fewer than 4,000.

The predicament facing Europe's far right and nationalist parties represents an interesting break with the past. In the last decade, most crises in the continent played out with a familiar winner. There was significant disunity between European leaders when it came to managing the financial crash and the refugee crisis. This fractured the European Union and opened a space for the far right.

Drawing on old notions of identity and boosted by online conspiracy theories, far right actors once again openly doubted European policies and attempted to take advantage of the crisis. But compared to the more scientific and realist approaches of most European governments, their response looks insufficient.

The far right has been the significant loser of the pandemic. Not only have these groups lost credibility, but their nationalist agenda looks irrelevant in the era of Covid-19. Amid lockdowns and closed borders, the issue of immigration has lost its significance in 2020 and the failure to come up with viable solutions to the biggest issue of the day has hurt the popularity of far right actors.

However, now the focus has shifted towards the need to return to 'normality' things might change. Impatience is growing among populations that have been living in lockdown for months.

A recession looms – and it looks set to dwarf the last. That presents opportunities to governments and fringe groups alike – opportunities that the far right will be actively looking into, to further weaken liberal democracies.

■ Georgios Samaras is a PhD candidate at the Department of European and International Studies, King's College London; this article also appears at theconversation.com

TOTEMIC TOTÒ



LOCAL HERO: Italian actor, playwright, poet and scriptwriter Totò (Antonio De Curtis), 1950s

Photo: Getty Images

Such was the popularity of the Neapolitan actor Antonio de Curtis – known as Totò – that when he died in 1967, he received three funerals. The first was in Rome, where he had died, and the second was in Naples. Then, a few days later, the third one, organised by the local Camorra boss, saw an empty casket carried along the packed streets of the Rione Sanità area of the city where the actor was born. Rione Sanità means 'healthy neighbourhood' and had been built as a home for wealthy, aristocratic families. By the time of Totò's birth, in 1898, however, it was one of Naples' most impoverished areas, where the Camorra were particularly established.

and resourceful rascals struggling to get by.

That picture contrasts sharply with the image of Naples in contemporary culture. For international audiences especially, Naples has become a place of dark intrigue. It is caught between *Gomorra's* post-industrial noir and the violence-tinged nostalgia of Ferrante's world.

Contrary to expectation, perhaps, the appeal of that world is not restricted to our bookshelves and screens. The (pre-pandemic) rise of *Gomorra* and Ferrante-related tours confirm the allure of the dark side of Naples.

Despite its obvious selling power, this representation of the city is not without its risks – and not just for Naples. Its dark connotations threaten to overshadow the traditional image of Italy and the artisanal 'Made in Italy' brand so carefully curated for the global economy. Which version of Naples will triumph is anyone's guess.

■ Ruth Glynn is a professor of modern Italian culture at the University of Bristol; this article also appears at theconversation.com

FLATLINING: Marine Le Pen's French far-right party National Rally has failed to capitalise on the Covid-19 crisis

Photo: Getty Images



especially in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The plays of Eduardo De Filippo and the comic genius of actor Totò, the most popular Italian performer of all time, secured Naples' renown at a national level.

Naples' role in film transferred to the international stage with the rise of Sofia Loren, who grew up in the city, in the 1950s. By then, Italy was a major production centre for English-language films, featuring Hollywood stars including Gregory Peck, Audrey and Katharine Hepburn, Clark Gable and Charlton Heston.

The popularity of Naples among English-language audiences capitalised on the memories of Allied soldiers who had been stationed in the city following its liberation in 1943. It also profited from the large Italian community in the US, many of whom hailed from the Naples area.

These 1950s films – romances and comedies, for the most part – played on the warm sunlight and natural beauty of the Bay of Naples. They portrayed the city as an upbeat and beguiling place, populated by strong women, fallible men



1

EXPERTISE

WAS EVERYONE TREATED THE SAME?

When we contacted the undertaker, he said: "I've got 14 bodies to pick up, I will get to you late afternoon." He finally turned up at 6pm, and when I saw him, he was in tears. Not just because he knew my brother, but because it was just so intense. He was distraught because he had never seen death on this scale. He'd seen 14 families that day and the mosque in Birmingham he worked with had installed some industrial freezers in marquees in the car park.

He came to the door and he said: "I can't come into the house, you need to bring his body downstairs."

So he gave us the body bag, and we went upstairs and my brothers and I, we rolled him over into it and rolled him back so he's facing the right way, and zipped up the body of my brother Umar.



He didn't ever seem stressed by anything, he always seemed to be above family tension and community tension – Umar had a connection with everyone.

My father worked as a catering contractor for the British Army in India and Cyprus and he came to the UK in 1961, with his wife and the three children that he had at that time. Umar, my brother, was 12 or thereabouts.

They settled in Birmingham, so Umar grew up there in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, my father reignited his interest in the British army. When the Troubles started in Northern Ireland, my brother decided to join my father in the business, providing catering services for the British army. He was my father's right hand man.

They travelled back and forth but came back permanently to Birmingham in the mid-1980s. My brother spoke half a dozen languages from the subcontinent and decided to go into interpreting, providing services for a variety of agencies, including the Home Office and the police. And that's something he continued for the best part of 30 years. So he was helping vulnerable people who have little understanding of the language, in very difficult and challenging situations, and he became a bit of a stalwart of the community.

When my father passed away in 2002, my brother became the lead member of our family. He was of the oldest generation of British Pakistanis and he enjoyed the role of being a sort of community leader, reducing tension in the community when there were issues.

When I was growing up, there wasn't any Google, so I spent an enormous amount of time down the library in order

Former chief prosecutor **NAZIR AFZAL** – who lost a brother during the pandemic – has instructed lawyers to investigate why no action was taken against Dominic Cummings for his lockdown breaches. He explains why



EXPERTISE

to digest knowledge, and he was a very strong supporter of me. All my brothers, all five of them eventually, were working in the family business, except for me and my sister. And so the conversations that would have been had without me being present, probably would have been: "Let him carry on with his studies. Let him follow his career path. He doesn't need to go down the route that we're all going down."

When I had any recognition in my career as a prosecutor, he was always extremely proud of it, he lived vicariously through me, I think.



My mother is 92, God bless her. She's extraordinarily robust – she was brought up in the mountains of Pakistan going up and down those hills – so the idea that she would get sick was new to us all.

But in the middle of February she got seriously ill and she ended up in Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham suffering significant breathing issues.

She wasn't tested, so we don't know whether or not she had Covid herself, but she was in hospital for about three weeks. I was in and out every other day, I'd be driving down from Manchester, to go and see my mother in hospital. And my whole family obviously descended upon her as well. I'd see my brother maybe every couple of visits. He was 71, but he looked in fine fettle. This is the strangest thing, out of all of us, he was probably the healthiest.

He made us all feel quite calm about what was happening. By the beginning of March, the hospital authorities decided there wasn't anything more they could do for my mother and it was a real danger that she may get Covid from within the hospital, so she went home with an oxygen tank, which she is still attached to 24/7.

Everybody went back to normal lives, but I learnt pretty soon that Umar wasn't well. Around March 23, I spoke to him on the phone. He'd been breathless, and he'd been pretty poorly. But he said he was getting better and there was no need for me to visit; he was in recovery mode, that's what he thought.

In the first week of April, I spoke to him again. He was obviously poorly, but was providing me reassurance that it was under control, that he'd been to the hospital, and that they had tested him. They sent him home, but we wouldn't find out the result until a week later.

And then the next thing was on the morning of April 8, which we now learn was the day on which the most people died. His wife, my sister-in-law, went into his bedroom at 9.30am. He'd been sleeping alone because of his illness, she couldn't raise him. She called for an ambulance but it was too late.

My youngest brother rang me up to tell me our brother's passed away. It came as a complete and utter shock.

I drove from Manchester and a large number of members of my direct family were there. My sister's daughter is a doctor and she was there. We were all wearing masks and gloves, which were handed out at the door.

After we carried him downstairs, we were able to place him inside the body bag on to the stretcher. Then my mother said to me, "I want to see his face for the last time". So we put the trolley in such a way that his face was facing the bay window so she could see her son.



SELFISH:
1 Number 10 special advisor Dominic Cummings holds his Rose Garden press conference on May 25 to defend his actions following revelations that he had travelled from London to Durham during lockdown

2 A volunteer walks past coffins stacked inside the temporary mortuary set up in the car park of the Central Jamia Mosque Ghamkol Sharif in Birmingham during the coronavirus pandemic

Photos: Getty Images



The next thing we had to do was to bury him. His desired wish was to be buried in Pakistan with my father, but there were no flights. So we contacted the cemetery in Birmingham, which has a large Muslim burial plot.

And they said: "Yes, absolutely, you can fit him in. But there are rules: only a maximum of six people can attend a funeral; they also have to be people who can lower the body into the ground because our staff won't do that. So they've got to be relatively healthy. And thirdly, you have 30 minutes because the next funeral has to take place."

I couldn't attend because there were only six people allowed and I decided that I couldn't break the regulations.

And so my brother Umar was buried at 6pm. My brothers and his son had to lower his body in the grave and at 29 minutes and 59 seconds after they

arrived, they were told to leave because the next family were coming to bury their loved one.

Like tens of thousands of families, we have not been able to mourn him.



At the same time, Dominic Cummings was going up and down the country. He started travelling up to Durham on March 27 and, we now know, was going on a day trip to Barnard Castle on his wife's birthday while we were waiting to get a death certificate to bury my brother.

My starting point is that he's one of the architects of the regulations, as a special advisor, he would have signed off on them. I worked in government for 30 years, I know how it operates. So he just signed off on the regulations and almost immediately after having signed off, he

decided to breach them and drive the 260 miles up to Durham.

The Rose Garden press conference should not have happened at all. He's a civil servant. I was a civil servant, I would never in a million years have been allowed to issue a press release, never mind have a press conference about a personal matter.

So all these special arrangements were made and in that press conference, he talks about what he did – the eye test, the stopping on the way back, all that sort of stuff – my 30 years of justice and trial experience tells me he is presenting his story in a way that fits the known facts. I was just head in my hands thinking, firstly, how is he allowed to do this? And secondly, how is he allowed to get away with this? And thirdly, what impact is this going to have on the rest of society and the rest of citizens, because we've all made extraordinary sacrifices.

We've got people shielding at home for months, who are not even able to leave the house, because they've got underlying conditions. You've got people who are not able to work, people who are not able to get a hug from somebody who they care about. These are extraordinary sacrifices we made, and yet one of the architects of it all, even on his own account, is driving a coach and horses through the regulations for his own selfish reasons.

But the bigger issue is the impact it had on the rest of us. The public discourse afterwards was, "well, why should I bother?"

We have lost tens of thousands of people, all of them prematurely. We could have lost even more had we not stayed at home and complied with the regulations – and yet he felt that they weren't important to him, they didn't apply to him. That was just appalling. It was shocking, bewildering.



I've spent a lifetime thinking that there's nobody above the law. They always used to say, without fear or favour. As a prosecutor, I've been on an Al Qaeda death list, I've had the far right demonstrating outside my house. I get it from all sides. I don't care. If the evidence is there, I don't care who they are. I've prosecuted celebrities. I've prosecuted people in positions of power and people who had got none. And that's what always drove me – yet suddenly, with Mr Cummings, if you had his position of power, and his protection of a shield around him you were safe. People have described it well, there was no shield around care homes, in our communities, but there was a proper good shield around him.

And you had all these ministers, tweeting, how 'it's all over now, he's said his piece and that's the end of it'. We were being treated like children, by the people who we've elected to positions of responsibility. And they were all protecting this unelected individual, despite what he had said and what he had done.

I've said a lot about how trust in society has been diminished over recent years. Trust was damaged by what he has done, the whole concept of lockdown has been damaged by what he has done and the fact that there seems to be one law for him and others who are in positions of

EXPERTISE

From page 31

power, but the rest of us, the 64.5 million, must sacrifice.

I felt really guilty when I was going to see my brother's dead body. It was an exceptional circumstance, but I felt really guilty about it. And I sense no guilt on his part, no apology on his part, no sensitivity or recognition on his part, that he had done anything wrong. And that really, really irked me.

Tens of thousands of people lost family members, all of them made sacrifices and there's millions of others who made sacrifices to protect their families. So it's personal, but it's also professional: it's just a matter of principle that whoever you are, wherever you are, the rules apply to you and that you need to accept that they apply to you and not try to excuse your way out of it.

You get Durham police carrying out the most cursory investigations, in no more than two days, during which they come back and say he might have breached regulations, but they won't do anything about it. I was chief executive of the police commissioners, I know that they need to do their job more thoroughly than they did. And I wonder, this is the question I asked myself – was there any pressure put upon them to brush it under the carpet as fast as possible? That is something that I want to get the bottom of – and I am relentless.

I don't want to prosecute him myself. I don't think I can legally anyway, I think the law is framed in such a way that the only people that can prosecute for breaches of regulations are the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. So I want them to do their job properly. And that means I want to understand, on behalf of you, me and everybody else who's made sacrifices, whether they had all the right information, whether they did so without undue pressure, and whether there ought to be a different outcome if they take account of everything that we now know.

My solicitors and my lawyers have had enormous numbers of people approach them since it became public that I wanted to get to the bottom of this. People have been approaching my solicitors with information which is not in the public domain. I use the phrase 'from reliable sources'.

Mr Cummings thinks that people in Whitehall, in Westminster, are prepared to stay quiet. That is not true. There are people horrified by his actions and they are prepared to share with us information that they have, that they think may be relevant to any police inquiry or prosecution decision. There are other sources from the North East and from London who provided information that probably wasn't known to the police and the prosecution authorities.

Certainly the police, from what we know, didn't have all the information, because they went so fast, as if it was any old breach by any old person, when in fact, this was the whole thing. This had the greatest impact you can possibly imagine on whether or not we were all going to comply with lockdown. They should have given it more thought – and information that we've received in the last month or so provides us with evidence that either challenges what Mr Cummings has already said, or provides us with other relevant events.



Lots of people have told us that they think there's a cover up. But I've spent a career working with evidence. I'm not a conspiracy theorist. So I want to make sure that anything that we've been told, can be properly verified and is corroborated.



When I reflect on what has happened to us as a family, working class children of immigrants, people from the BAME community most impacted by Covid, then I can't escape the idea that there's one law for us and there's another law for people in authority, people who are donors, fathers of the prime minister, special adviser to the prime minister, people who, in my view, correctly, impose their regulations on all of us, but incorrectly and unlawfully decided to breach them themselves.

We, as a country, have not been able to mourn the loss that we've all experienced. There will be a reckoning going forward. And as part of that reckoning people will want to know, was everybody treated the same?

I've lived a career which has been about equality and about justice and I feel there has been injustice here. And that we've been treated unequally.

Then, we must ask about consequences. A £60 fine or £120 fine is irrelevant, to me; it's the fact that the state should decide that somebody has breached or somebody hasn't breached.

Ministers keep boasting, we're meant to be world-leading and world class and world-beating. I just want us to be British: previously, if you failed, you resigned; if you lied to parliament, you resigned; if you lied in public, you resigned. But now, it seems that's not the case anymore.

We need to go back to the first principles of public life about honesty and integrity, and accountability and transparency.

When I consider the government's performance throughout the pandemic and I think about what I have seen in my own career, I am left with a fundamental question about power: who has it and who does not?

First and foremost, government is for ensuring the safety of its citizens. And, you know, I look back at what was happening in February – even I knew at the end of February when we were visiting my mother in the hospital, I was hearing how they were bracing for something tremendously challenging. So if I knew that, can you imagine what government should have been thinking and what government should have been doing? Thousands of people were dying every day in Italy but we weren't prepared. We didn't have the PPE that we should have had. We locked down a week late. That means tens of thousands of people died, that shouldn't have died. And that could have been my brother, his death could have been avoided, if we'd locked down just 10 days earlier.

I didn't take my brother's illness seriously enough, for which I blame myself. But that's because the prime minister was telling me that all we needed to do was wash our hands. The government was telling us that this was not that bad. We were having the Cheltenham horseracing festival. I didn't take it seriously. Maybe if I had, I'd have seen my brother before he died.

I'm not a scientist. Neither are they. But 50,000 deaths may have been prevented. That's 50,000 families – a million people at least. My feeling through all of this is it could have been

SHORT-SIGHTED: Dominic Cummings claims he drove to Barnard Castle to test his eyesight on April 12 – as Nazir Afzal was waiting to get a death certificate to bury his brother

Photo: Getty Images

avoided and should have been avoided, and would have been avoided if people responded with the seriousness that they should have done – and that includes Mr Cummings. We need to understand what happened, now. And there need to be consequences. People need to respond, resign and accept responsibility. We need accountability and we need it now.

My brother wasn't allowed into the hospital. He wasn't allowed to stay there because they didn't have any room in the end. Go home and isolate, he was told – and we only found out the day after he died that he had tested positive for Covid-19. So people were being sent home to die. My brother's death was completely invisible to the state. We weren't prepared. We were making it up as we went along. The way this has been handled has been a disaster.

■ Nazir Afzal is a former chief prosecutor for the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales. His book *The Prosecutor* is out now, published by Penguin

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AU'S TRAGIC FAILURE TO SILENCE THE GUNS

CHRIS CHANGWE

NSHIMBI on why the African Union has not been able to meet its own pledge to end conflicts across the continent



Seven years ago African leaders committed themselves to working towards an end to armed conflict. As they marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the African Union (AU) they swore to ensure lasting peace on the continent. They pledged not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans.

The pledge was followed by the adoption in 2016 of the Lusaka Road Map to end conflict by 2020. The document outlined 54 practical steps that needed to be taken. They focused on political, economic, social, environmental and legal issues, ranging from adequately funding the African Standby Force for deployment, to stopping rebels or insurgents and their backers from accessing weapons. Other steps included fighting human trafficking, corruption and illicit financial flows.

At the time of the declaration, Africa had disproportionately high levels of violence. State and non-state actors in Africa waged about 630 armed conflicts between 1990 and 2015. Those orchestrated by non-state actors accounted for more than 75% of conflicts globally.

The efforts to 'silence the guns' has been singularly ineffective. Since that pledge, conflict in Africa has increased. One reason is that the 2020 goal was too

ambitious given the number of conflicts. Another is that many are internal, arising from the grievances citizens have with their governments.

To make some headway the AU needs to recognise this, and design solutions to conflicts that are informed by the need to protect human rights. The continental body should be empowered to act against any party that violates core values centred on human dignity. Prominent conflicts by non-state actors include the Tuareg separatist and jihadist insurgencies in Mali, Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, jihadist and militia insurgencies in Burkina Faso, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and the ethnic war in the Central African Republic. The most notable civil wars are those in Libya, South Sudan and the one waged by Anglophone Ambazonia separatists in Cameroon.

Most conflicts are generally centred on these areas:

- Sahel region, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Northern Nigeria, Chad, Sudan and Eritrea;
- Lake Chad area, including Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria;
- Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Kenya;
- Great Lakes region, notably Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda.

Though domestic, most tend to be cross-border in form. They threaten interstate and regional stability. For example, al-Shabaab in Somalia exploits porous borders to carry out deadly attacks in Kenya. Most of Africa's conflicts are also increasingly characterised by violent extremism. The emerging unrest in the Cabo Delgado Province in Mozambique falls into this category.

Some conflicts have been raging for decades. These include fighting in the Western Sahara, conflict in the Maghreb region involving the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the Somali civil war, and the Allied Democratic Forces and

TROUBLE-TORN: Tuareg rebels patrolling near their camp in the north of Kidal, Mali

Photo: Getty Images

Lord's Resistance Army insurgencies in Uganda and the DRC.

Eighteen years ago the AU changed its Constitutive Act, allowing it to intervene in the internal affairs of member states. Nevertheless, it's been reluctant to do so. For instance, it is conspicuously absent while bloodshed escalated in Cameroon and Libya. There has been one notable exception: the organisation's refusal to countenance a coup in Sudan last year, and suspending the country's membership in June 2019. This should be the norm.

But it highlighted the AU's double standards. The Union tacitly countenanced the coups in Egypt in 2013 and Zimbabwe in 2017.

Although it did suspend Egypt after the coup led by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, it subsequently restored its membership in 2014, and went on to make president El-Sisi its rotational chairman in 2019 – going against its own rule that bans coup leaders from occupying political office.

The organisation never suspended Zimbabwe over the coup that ended Robert Mugabe's despotic presidency. Neither did it speak out against General Constantino Chiwenga, the coup leader, becoming the vice president.

Another example of failure has been in Libya, where the AU has been wringing its hands while deadly conflict escalates and external actors make it their war theatre. These include Turkey, Egypt, Russia and United Arab Emirates.

The presence of foreign military forces on the continent is of concern beyond Libya. The increasing number has been recognised by the African Union Peace and Security Council as a problem. The numbers are going up via bilateral agreements between African states and foreign governments.

African countries gain economically from hosting foreign military bases. Djibouti, for example, earns about \$63 million annually from the US and \$20m from China by leasing territory for military bases. It also hosts British, French, German, Italian, Japanese and

Spanish military sites. The foreign actors establish themselves in Africa to protect their economic interests and for strategic reasons. Djibouti, for instance, is close to the Middle East and the Red Sea.

The AU should revisit its Constitutive Act to address principles that limit its ability to intervene in conflicts in member states' territories. This will set the stage for crafting robust legislation, policies, institutions and mechanisms for long-term stability in such countries.

Following that, the organisation should work through regional economic communities and people at grassroots to end conflict. Its eight recognised regions should emulate the successes of the Economic Community of West African States.

The regional bloc occasionally gives early warnings of brewing conflicts in member states. It has also provided military support and helped reform the security sector in Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Liberia, and has helped with post-conflict reconstruction. Notably, its military intervention in the Gambia forced the despotic Yahya Jammeh to vacate office in early 2017, after losing the presidential elections.

The issue of foreign military forces on the continent should also be addressed. Here the AU has no control over their growing presence because they come through bilateral agreements between member states and foreign powers. But it should work through its regional organisations to play a role in these decisions. There's a precedent: the Southern African Development Community under the chairmanship of late Zambian president Levy Mwanawasa opposed the establishment of an American base in the region. Southern Africa went on to establish its own regional military brigade instead.

■ Chris Changwe Nshimbi is a director and research fellow at the University of Pretoria; this article also appears at the conversation.com

EXPERTISE

Mitch Benn

Comedian,
Musician,
Writer

It's good to know that as the country sinks into ever more viscous mires of torpor and despair, there's still someone out there who can be guaranteed to raise a smile. I refer of course to the honourable Chris Grayling MP.

His failure to secure the post of chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee – in other words, managing not to get a job he'd essentially already been given – is perhaps the most heroically on-brand thing a British politician has done since Margaret Thatcher stole the milk.

While Grayling had been, for reasons we'll allude to in a moment, Number 10's pick for the position, the committee chose instead to exercise due process (ie. do their jobs) and vote instead to elect Julian Lewis, a man who could scarcely be described as a liberal bedwetter on any issue but who has nonetheless been rewarded for his diligence by having the Conservative whip withdrawn.

Because in Boris Johnson's Westminster, as in Donald Trump's White House, unquestioning loyalty to the leader is the only virtue. And as most people – but unfortunately, neither of the two leaders in question – can see, that way disaster lies.

If your sole criterion for deciding whom to elevate to positions of responsibility within your organisation is their personal loyalty to you, you are not, nor can you ever be, to coin a phrase, hiring the best people.

It's easy to see why this has become a priority – both the Trump and Johnson administrations and their respective fanbases are pursuing agendas which are increasingly unmoored from reality, and as such are hard to back up with things like facts and reason.

An appeal to political tribal loyalty, on the other hand, can be deployed to justify literally anything, and so the tribalisation of politics has been enthusiastically pursued on both sides of the Atlantic since our respective 2016 electoral upsets.

And thus we see the rise of the obsequiocracy. Since questions are toxic (because they require answers, and answers are hard), only those who never ask them may be allowed to advance.

And as I said, while being surrounded by sycophants is no doubt a comfort to a leader (especially, say, purely hypothetically, a brittle narcissistic leader haunted by a deep-seated awareness of his own inadequacy and prone to grotesque acts of compensatory self-aggrandisement) it's scarcely a basis for good government.

You see, loyalty is a positive thing, in many ways and in many circumstances. It's a good thing in a romantic partner. It's to be encouraged between retailers and their customers. It's an excellent virtue in a dog.

But the thing about loyalty – especially devout, unquestioning loyalty such as is prized by our current leaders – is that it's scarcely an indicator of intelligence. Quite the reverse, in fact.

PITFALLS OF THE
OBSEQUIOCRACY

The more (one hesitates to use such a reductive term as 'clever', so let's go with...) 'intellectually curious' one is, the less likely one is to be able to switch off one's critical faculties and believe unswervingly and wholeheartedly (although one might be able to pretend to, of which more in a moment).

Similarly, the more, shall we say 'intellectually incurious' one were, the easier one would find it to get on board with an agenda, casting aside doubt and uncertainty.

As such, if individuals are to be promoted purely on the basis of their (apparent) loyalty to you, then there are two sorts of people this will favour: those who simply lack the capacity for analytical thought, such as might occasion them to experience doubt, and those who see right through you but who

ON-BRAND:
Chris Grayling
failed in his
bid to become
chair of the
Intelligence
and Security
Committee

Photo: Getty
Images

are clever enough to feign unswerving loyalty while awaiting their moment to strike.

In other words, your selected ministers and appointees will fall into two categories: the ones who are not competent enough to do their jobs, and the ones who are actively plotting your downfall.

You've surrounded yourself with echoing empty vessels on one hand and Brutuses-in-waiting on the other.

I'm sure we can all think of plenty of examples of the first type in our administration (and, in fairness, in all our political organisations just now). I shouldn't imagine that there's anyone matching the second definition in our current cabinet. I think the British people have had enough of that sort of speculation.

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EUROFILE

COUNTRY LIFE: Hawkwind
at Rockfield for the
recording of *Doremi Fasol
Latido*, 1973. From left,
Nik Turner, Dik Mik, Del
Dettmar, Simon King, Dave
Brock and Lemmy
Photo: Getty Images

ROCK ON THE FARM



BILL BORROWS ON THE REMARKABLE STORY OF
ROCKFIELD, THE RURAL RECORDING STUDIO THAT
HAS PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN MUSICAL HISTORY



EUROFILE MUSIC

And then Elvis turned up... Not actually in person in Monmouth, South Wales (although as you read on that will seem a much less fanciful notion than you might be prepared to accept at this stage) but just to change the world in 1955.

"If it wasn't for Elvis Presley we wouldn't be talking now," says 80-year-old Kingsley Ward. "If he hadn't turned up looking like he did and playing like he did, closely followed by Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis... Bloody hell. I was 15 and when he walked out it was like something from another planet. I. Could. Not. Believe. It. I'd never even seen an electric guitar before." The die was cast.

The ripples from that monumental stone cast into the lake continue to wash up on the shore but back in 1950s south Wales one of them would serve to convince two young men (Kingsley and his brother Charles) that their futures lay away from shovelling s**t on a farm and in another area completely – in short, they decided to "get into rock 'n' roll".

There was no handbook but buying a guitar seemed to be an integral part of the process so that is what they did. By the start of the following decade, at the same time Elvis was leaving the army and four lads from Liverpool had just started playing clubs in Hamburg, they had a group and a couple of songs.

The next step was to get a deal and, driven by ambition and entrepreneurial chutzpah, they borrowed a tape recorder, made a demo and drove to see EMI in London.

After a diversion via a pressing plant in Middlesex ("We'd taken the address off the back of one of the records and just assumed that was where they must be based"), they walked through the front door at EMI House, asked to meet producer George Martin, were told that he was unavailable and to come back the following Tuesday.

"George was a lovely chap. He didn't mind that we'd brought a tape recorder with us and loved our songs. He said to come back in six months and he would see if he could help us."

That second meeting never happened and the chances are that you have never heard of the Charles Kingsley Combo (or The Thunderbolts – the name they chose when they got a record deal in America) but this is not yet another tale of rock 'n' roll 'so near but yet so far', from the *We Coulda Been Contenders* catalogue.

Quite the reverse. Indeed, there are few people who have played a more integral part in the history of rock 'n' roll over the last 60 years than Kingsley and Charles Ward and they made it all happen on the farm where they grew up.

You may know it as Rockfield Studios: the place where *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Wonderwall* and *Yellow* and, at one point in 1997, seven of the top 10 albums were recorded.

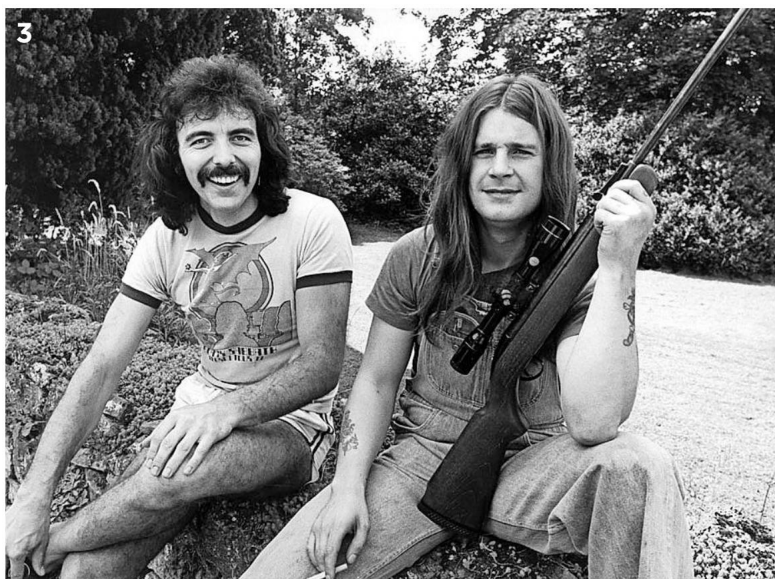


Either fate or a combination of George Martin's diary commitments and the impatience of the Ward brothers drove them into the arms of legendary producer and sound engineer Joe Meek in 1961.

"A friend of mine suggested we talk to him so we took him an acetate with another couple of songs on it," says Kingsley. "I was playing the organ on one track and it sounded a bit like *Telstar* [the



MUSIC EUROFILE



BARNSTORMING:

1 The Stone Roses' seminal eponymous debut album was recorded at Rockfield

2 Queen spent three months at Rockfield recording *A Night at the Opera* in 1975

3 Black Sabbath's Tony Iommi and Ozzy Osbourne at Rockfield, 1977

Photos: Andre Csillag/REX/Shutterstock/Getty Images

instrumental written and produced by Meek for the Tornados which would become the first record by a British group to reach No.1 in the US when it was released the following year]. He nearly had a heart attack and signed us up on the spot because he didn't want us taking that sound anywhere else."

They stayed with Meek until 1965, learning the rudiments of production from one of the most influential sound engineers of all time and taking that knowledge back to Monmouth and the little studio they had built in the attic space at the farm.

Soon, so many local bands were queuing up to have their music recorded in the hope they would be able to chase down a deal with the major record labels that the brothers were able to build a second, bigger studio at the farm ("The Granary").

By accident, if you take Kingsley at face value, but more likely by design, they were now the owners of the one of the only professional recording studios

outside London. News travelled fast. Dave Edmunds turned up from Cardiff.

"He was such a good musician we had to up our game but that was good for us," says Kingsley. "We were called Future Sounds Limited then but Dave said, 'I've just seen a sign to a village called Rockfield, why don't call yourselves that'. It sounded just right and we've been called that ever since."



In 1967 a band called Elephant's Memory – later the Plastic Ono Elephant's Memory Band – flew over but had nowhere to stay.

The brothers put them up at their mother's house next to the farm and, just like that, the world's first residential recording studio was born.

A year later they invested £5,000 in 8-track recorders like those being used by

EUROFILE MUSIC



From page 37

George Martin at Abbey Road and a third studio was added, 'The Coach House'. "We'd caught up with the majors," he says now.

So, with little to choose in terms of technology, and an offer that included beautiful surroundings and tranquillity away from the chaos of urban life – perfectly in tune with the hippie zeitgeist – and privacy plus (in theory) a distance from the manifold temptations and distractions readily available elsewhere, Rockfield became the go-to destination for labels who needed their artists to deliver.

The artists loved it too. "Just to go from Birmingham to Monmouth was an adventure," Ozzy Osbourne tells the makers of new BBC documentary *Rockfield: The Studio on the Farm*. He was there with Black Sabbath in 1970 to record their album *Paranoid*. "We'd never been in a studio, we'd never been on a farm or seen a cow in a field. It was

brilliant... it allowed us the freedom to play it as loud as we liked, there were roof tiles rattling off."

The freedom extended beyond time in the studio. "Lemmy came with Hawkwind," says Kingsley. "'Hello', he said, 'I'm Lemmy, where can I hide my stash?' Two minutes later, [guitarist and founder] Dave Brock appeared. 'Hi I'm Dave. Where's Lemmy hidden his stash?' *I Hear You Knocking* by Dave Edmunds was recorded at the studio and became a worldwide hit in 1972. The brothers added a landing strip in an adjacent field.

In 1975 David Cassidy, unarguably the biggest rock star in the world at the time, touched down at Heathrow to be greeted by thousands of screaming girls but was in Monmouth two-and-a-half hours later riding around the yard on one of the Ward children's ponies ("The next day at school the teacher asked them why they weren't in the day before and they said, 'We were riding our ponies with David Cassidy' and of course the teachers don't believe them do they").

RURAL ROCK:
1 Kingsley Ward at the desk in the early 1970s

2 Oasis recorded (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory* at Rockfield in 1995

3 Manic Street Preachers' Nicky Wire, left, and James Dean Bradfield. The band recorded *This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours* (1998) at Rockfield

Photos: Ward family/Getty Images/ieie productions

And if the biggest names in the world were beating a path to the door, there was always time for acts on the way up. Queen had recorded *Sheer Heart Attack* at the studio in 1974 but had so little money that Kingsley had to lend them the train fare to get back to London. When they returned a year later to record *A Night at the Opera* it was on slightly different terms.

"They were loaded by then," remembers their erstwhile benefactor. "They were still the same lovely guys but they had crew and a tour manager and a bit more time on their hands. At one point Brian [May] and Roger [Taylor] were playing frisbee in the yard and I was thinking, blimey they haven't done much so I asked Brian what was going on? And he said, 'Freddie's in there writing something' and pointed to the tack room where we kept the saddles for the kids' horses. There was an old piano in there and he was just finishing off *Bohemian Rhapsody*... out of the window you could see the old weather vane and my brother

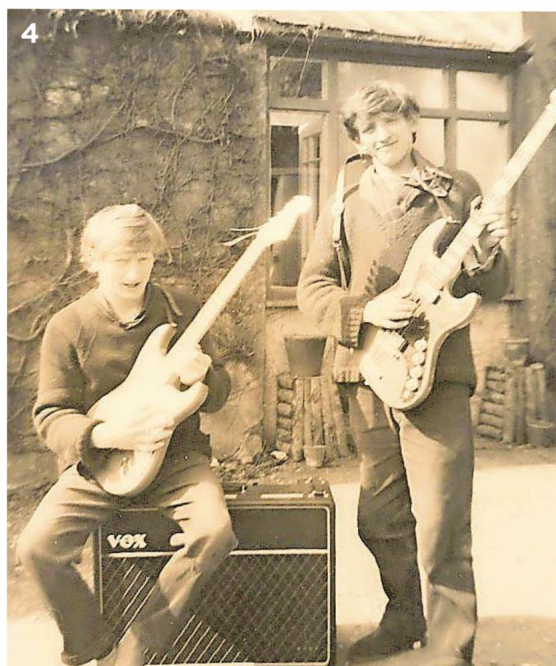
thinks that he might have been looking at that when he wrote 'Any way the wind blows' but we don't know for sure."

And so, adding to its legacy every year, by the late 1970s the studio was known as the place where *Bohemian Rhapsody* was born. That would be enough of a historical footprint for anywhere else but it is merely a footnote in the history of Rockfield. The bands who have recorded there are listed by decade at the end of the documentary but even such a stellar roll call will never do the studio justice.



Seminal albums such as *Kings of the Wild Frontier* (Adam and the Ants), *Reel to Real Cacophony* (Simple Minds), *The Stone Roses* (The Stone Roses), *What's the Story (Morning Glory)?* (Oasis), *This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours* (Manic Street Preachers) and *Parachutes* (Coldplay) may all have been made in Monmouth but the essence of the place is in the stories around the recordings and Liam

MUSIC EUROFILE



Gallagher, Ozzy, a couple of Manics and Chris Martin all feature in the film to pay tribute.

We learn that Wonderwall was partly recorded with Noel Gallagher sitting on a wall next to 'The Coach House' as Bonehead drove him mad with a remote control car in the yard and that the air rifles had to be locked away; the inspiration for *Yellow* was the studio copy of the *Yellow Pages* and the chorus was written in the bath here; and that Iggy Pop once brought David Bowie holding a huge chunk of cheese and a can of Heineken along to a Simple Minds recording session.

What we don't learn is the real sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll stuff, the kind of behaviour that had the local constabulary parked at the bottom of the drive taking the registration numbers of those coming and going.

The early morning arrest of the Stone Roses still covered in paint after trashing their former record company's office is already in the public domain, as is the

tragic death of Charlatans keyboard player Rob Collins in a car crash while the band were resident, but there are no fabulous indiscretions. That would, of course, be bad for business. What goes on tour etc...

"We just let them get on with it," says Kingsley, a touch disingenuously. "We don't pay them any attention. There are no plaques here, no gold or silver discs. We find that tacky. Whatever other studios do, we do the opposite."

Would that include planning for the future? "You can never predict what's going to happen in the future, we tend to reinvent ourselves every 10 years but as a general rule when guitar music is popular, so are we. The internet has done the music business in completely and nobody buys anything anymore so there's no cashflow but we'll be fine. We've diversified and we'll just wait and see who turns up next."

■ *Rockfield: The Studio on the Farm* is available on BBC iPlayer



ORIGINS:

4 The almost famous Charles Kingsley Combo, very early 1960s

5 Rockfield: 'Play it as loud as you like'

6 The Ward family (and David Cassidy's favourite horse). Helping bands climb the ladder since 1965

7 Charles and Kingsley in farmer mode

8 The farm: 'And just over there Freddie Mercury wrote *Bohemian Rhapsody*'

9 From left, Rob Coombes, Danny Goffey, Gaz Coombes and Mick Quinn of Supergrass, at Rockfield Studios during the recording of *Life On Other Planets*, 2002

Photos: Ward family / Getty Images

EUROFILE MUSIC

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

I Have Confidence

Julie Andrews

SOPHIA DEBOICK on a place that still revels in its two musical connections from very different eras, and with very different sounds



The streets of Salzburg are haunted by two ghosts: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Maria von Trapp. Both were real flesh and blood people, but in their fictional portrayals they have become figures of myth and conduits of the musical dreams of millions.

Salzburg is a Baroque jewel on the periphery of the Alps, its monolithic 11th century Hohensalzburg Fortress dominating the city's uniquely beautiful skyline of spires, turrets and domes set against mountain peaks.

Yet Mozart, a man whose name is synonymous with musical genius, and the Trapp Family Singers, whose dramatised story saw Salzburg splashed across cinema screens in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music* (1965), ably compete with the city's architectural wonders as centrepieces of Salzburg's tourist economy.

This may be where the Catholic priest Joseph Mohr wrote *Silent Night* in 1816 and where the Electric Love Festival routinely attracts more than 100,000 electronic music fans, but it is the shadows of Wolfgang and Maria that visitors hope to glimpse in Salzburg.

Even before Mozart's birth in the city, Salzburg could boast an impressive musical reputation. It was the place where opera was first performed north of the Alps, the open-air Steintheater (Rock Theatre), a former quarry in the grounds of Schloss Hellbrunn on the southern outskirts of the city hosting Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* in 1617.

Composer of church music Michael Haydn, younger brother of Joseph Haydn, was appointed concertmaster to the archbishop of Salzburg in 1762 and spent the rest of his life there. Indeed, the vibrant musical life of Salzburg cathedral, as well as Salzburg University's *singspiels*, also made the city a notable musical locale before the *wunderkind* know to his family as 'Wolferl' made his genius known, but he would give the city an unassailable place in the history of the western classical tradition.

Born in a third-floor apartment at No. 9 Getreidegasse in 1756, Mozart moved across the Salzach river to a house at Makartplatz Square aged 17, by which time he had already travelled far beyond Salzburg as a child prodigy.

But having returned to the city in December 1771 he was at risk of being written off before he was even out of his teens. Musicologist Charles Burney had met the young composer in 1770 and wrote in his *The Present State of Music in Germany* (1773) that Mozart's works of that period, which included the *Divertimenti* – otherwise known as the *Salzburg Symphonies* – written by the 16-year-old Mozart early in 1772, were an "instance of early fruit being more extraordinary than excellent".

There was a sense of claustrophobia in Salzburg as the seat of a Prince-Archbishopric that was one of



THE CITY THAT PLAYS TWO TUNES

**CLIMB EV'RY
MOUNTAIN:**

1 Julie Andrews starred in *The Sound Of Music* (1965) based on the story of the von Trapp family

2 Baroness Maria Augusta von Trapp sings with the Trapp Family Singers, 1930

Photos: Getty Images

Germany's many small states, and Mozart's return to the city marked the beginning of the slow decline of his relationship with the place of his birth.

The archbishop Count von Schrattenbach, a patron to the Mozart family, died shortly after his return and the unsympathetic Count Hieronymus von Colloredo succeeded him.

When he appointed Mozart as a court musician in 1773 it would mark the beginning of a period of creative development – his *Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat Major* of 1777 was the pivotal work which saw his 'voice' truly emerge – but also of drudgery.

His court duties were poorly-paid and works like his *Church Sonatas*, which he was compelled rather than inspired to write, kept him from his real passion – opera.

In June 1781, Mozart was finally sacked by the Prince-Archbishop who was fed up with his constant moonlighting, and he wrote to his father that he had been sent off "with a kick in the a**e" from the

Prince-Archbishop's steward, Count Arco.

The 25-year-old Mozart departed for Vienna, where he would write his great operas over the next decade, concluding "Salzburg no longer exists for me", adding "except to give me some favourable opportunity to return Count Arco's kick with interest, even should I meet him in the public street".

Mozart never visited Salzburg in the final eight years of his short life and his *Grosse Messe in C Minor* was the last work with a clear connection to the city, written to mark the occasion of taking his fiancée Constanze there to meet his family in 1783.

Mozart was over a decade dead by the time the Napoleonic Wars broke out, and by the end of those wars, the city was much changed under the secular rule of the Austrian empire.

Salzburg became part of Austria-Hungary in 1866 until the First Austrian Republic was declared in 1919. With the Anschluss of 1938 the city became



consumed by the Third Reich and its destructive power.

By that time, the von Trapp family had already made their escape from the restrictions of Salzburg like Mozart before them, but, also like the young genius, they would leave a profound mark on the city.

Hollywood doesn't always tinker with the truth, and despite many adornments to the 1949 memoir *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* on which it was based, *The Sound of Music* was accurate in depicting Maria as a novice nun at a Salzburg convent sent to be governess to the seven children of an aristocratic naval officer at his home on the outskirts of the city.

Maria Kutschera married baron Georg von Trapp in 1927 and they had three further children together. 1933 brought both the worst year of the Great Depression and the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany.

The family faced financial difficulty and formed a singing troupe, touring within Austria and gaining a certain level of domestic fame. After the German takeover of Austria, the baron was offered a commission in the navy, but he rejected Nazi ideology and the family fled Salzburg for the US. The story of *The Sound of Music* was born.

Today, Salzburg trades on both the real-life von Trapps and *The Sound of Music* filming locations. The Villa Trapp, the real home of the family, is now a hotel, although the 17th century Schloss Frohnburg on the other side of the river is the more visited as the von Trapp home in the film (it is before the intimidating grandness of its façade that Julie Andrews as Maria visibly wilts at the end of her first big number, *I Have Confidence*). The fountains on Residenzplatz and Karajanplatz and the gardens of the 17th century Mirabell Palace are the backdrop to *Do-Re-Mi*.

The pavilion where Liesl and Rolf sing *Sixteen Going on Seventeen*, once in the grounds of Schloss Leopoldskron, has been relocated three miles south to Schloss Hellbrunn and is a tourist favourite. Nonnberg Abbey, where the real Maria was a novice, appears in the

FOUNDING A FESTIVAL

The brainchild of the film and theatre director Max Reinhardt, the inaugural Salzburger Festspiele took place in 1920. Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann*, an adaptation of the Everyman medieval mystery play with music by Jean Sibelius, was the centrepiece that year and has been performed annually ever since. Von Hofmannsthal saw the festival as encouraging a "Europeanism that fulfilled and enlightened the period from 1750 to 1850" in the wake of the ruptures of the First World War, but it was Salzburger conductor Herbert von Karajan who shaped the festival into a truly international event after he became festival artistic director in 1956.

film, while the fictional family hide from marauding Nazis in the grounds of St Peter's Abbey.

The gloomily atmospheric Baroque former stables of the Felsenreitschule are where the family perform in the singing contest at the film's climax.

In *The Sound of Music* music is a means of the expression of love, most importantly for baron von Trapp, who rediscovers both his voice and his romantic and paternal emotions through song, but also of defiance and escape – literally, as the von Trapps use the musical performance as cover to make a dash for the border.

For all the sense of historical tangibility that visiting a place associated with a musical legend gives, it is the music that really moves, and from the drama of Mozart's *Requiem* to the rousing emotion of *Climb Ev'ry Mountain*, Salzburg shows that the music that really speaks to us can range from the unassailable classical greats to the allegedly kitsch mid-century musical.

STAR TURNS BY TIM WALKER



FAY'S TALL, DARK.. AND HAIRY LEADING MAN

The producer told Fay Wray that she was going to have "the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood" and she optimistically thought it might be Cary Grant. It turned out to be a giant ape – or at least an 18-inch model of one that was made to look a lot bigger with some technical wizardry – and she was to play his love interest. The film was *King Kong*.

Wray was a feisty 82 when I caught up with her as she was promoting her memoirs, which she'd amusingly entitled *On the Other Hand*. There was a picture of her on the cover being held in King Kong's left paw. A part in a classic can weigh heavily on an actor – it's all the fans ever want to talk about for decades and it inevitably results in typecasting – but Wray knew the moment she saw the script that this was the film that was going to make her name.

"The part was going to go to Jean Harlow, but she'd had contractual obligations elsewhere and someone suggested me," she told me, self-deprecatingly. "I jumped at it because I could see that it had a marvellous charm about it. It was such a silly story really, but I knew they'd make it beautifully and indeed they did. You really can't fault it, even today. The special effects were way ahead of their time, but it isn't even those that make the picture so special. It's the way it makes you care about Kong, so that when eventually he falls to his death from the Empire State Building, it's hard not to shed a tear."

She had allowed her hair to turn iron grey, but her lipstick was bright red and she had retained a definite twinkle in her eyes. She seemed somewhat startled still to be alive. "I am about the only person that appears in my book who has a pulse," she said. "I think though it will do well as nobody will ever forget the stars of the golden age of Hollywood. They forget them these days, of course, but then again they don't have so much class."

Still, Wray said making *King Kong* wasn't so terribly glamorous. "Quite frankly, it was more of an endurance test. The rear-projection process we used making that film – me having to pretend to see the gigantic Kong that would later be added in by the special effects boys – was exhausting. There was one scene that – I kid you not – required me to work for 22 hours without a break. It was hard to summon up much energy towards the end when the director shouted 'scream, scream for your life, Fay!'"

Other scenes put her in physical danger. "The close-up scenes when I was

in Kong's paw were done with the thing attached to a lever that could be raised or lowered, but sometimes the fingers that were supposed to be holding me became loose and I had to shout at the props man when it looked like they were about to snap off and fall to the ground along with me."

She felt the film had aged remarkably well, all things considered, and it was all worth the effort. "Sometimes you find yourself making a film where it's really just a job for everyone involved – no one really cares about it, one way or the other – but with *King Kong* everyone involved was a total perfectionist. I think that was really what made it worth so much more than the sum of its parts. I think if any other group of individuals had got together to make that film it would almost certainly have descended into farce. We took it incredibly seriously."

She had never appeared in a real classic before *King Kong* and nor did she after it, and, although three-times married, she joked that the mighty ape was the most enduring love affair of her life. When, in 2004, Peter Jackson suggested she appear in a small cameo in his upcoming remake of *King Kong*, she had no hesitation in declining and pointedly let it be known she felt the original Kong could only ever be the true King. When she died later that year at the grand age of 97, the lights of the Empire State Building – where she'd played her last big scene with Kong – were lowered in her honour.



GOLDEN AGE: Canadian-born actress Fay Wray in *King Kong* (1933)

Photo: Getty Images

EUROFILE BOOKS

CHARLIE CONNELLY on a new novel about a Stasi agent immersed in the chilling oppression of the East German state, right up until its final moments



A few years ago I was in Leipzig with a film crew. We were being taken around the city by a local fixer called Tomas, a giant of a man but warm and gentle, softly spoken with kind eyes of the palest blue. We'd pull up outside another location on our itinerary – most likely connected to Bach – and Tomas would go ahead and talk to the people inside while we removed flight cases and tripods from the back of the van and prepared to disrupt everything and everyone around us for the sake of a few seconds' footage while Tomas kept everyone happy. Everyone loved Tomas.

Towards the end of the first day we parked outside a building on the corner of a square, a building with a rounded doorway that gave it its name, Runde Ecke, 'round corner'. The Runde Ecke was once the local headquarters of the East German secret police, the Stasi, and is now a museum. For us it was just another place to tick off the list, another session of unloading and unpacking before putting everything away again and doing the same thing somewhere else.

We had set off up the steps when I noticed that Tomas was missing. As the others disappeared through the doors I looked round and saw him still standing by the van, looking up uncertainly towards the building. Trotting back down the steps I asked if he was OK. He looked very pale.

"That building..." he said, and paused. "When I was growing up it was a terrifying place. People went in through those doors and sometimes they never came out again. Friends of mine. I don't think I can go in there. It still scares me too much. I'm sorry."

Years after the fall of the Berlin Wall Tomas could still sense the menace, the darkness, the danger epitomised by a building that once housed the secret police, and it still activated something deep within him. The Runde Ecke is in a prominent location at the corner of one of Leipzig's busiest squares and Tomas passed it all the time but it still triggered deep-seated fear.

He'd already told me about how he'd been part of the mass protests held in the square in 1989, demonstrations that helped to kickstart the movement that eventually brought down the Wall, describing how military police would charge through the crowds beating protesters indiscriminately, himself included.

If seeing the building at the heart of the terror was bad enough, the thought of going through its doors was too much for him to bear.

I left Tomas in the van and went inside. The display cases were filled with some of the equipment and techniques with which the Stasi monitored every aspect of the lives of East German citizens. The cameras – including a harness designed to make its wearer look heavily pregnant

THE SPY WHO STAYED IN THE COLD



with a camera fitted roughly where the navel would be – the disguises, the endless paperwork, even jars with lids screwed tight that contained the scents of the people of Leipzig: in the DDR even your very essence wasn't your own.

I thought of this – and Tomas – as I read *The Standardisation of Demoralization Procedures*, the debut novel by Jennifer Hofmann.

Demoralization was what the Stasi did best. It wasn't long into the existence of the German Democratic Republic before they realised physical torture wasn't usually necessary. Why go to the trouble of tearing out fingernails or pulling teeth when you could break someone mentally instead? No bruises, no blood, same result.

Bernd Zeiger, Hofmann's protagonist, is an ageing Stasi man, a career bureaucrat in East Berlin whose early promise as a secret policeman hadn't really flourished into a steady rise up the career ladder of surveillance and oppression.

There had been two key moments in Zeiger's working life. One was his involvement in the questioning of a physicist named Johannes Held who in the early 1960s had travelled to a

STATE SECRETS:

The archive of the Stasi – the former East German secret police – in Berlin. Below, Jennifer Hoffmann, whose debut novel is *The Standardisation of Demoralization Procedures*

Photos: Getty Images / Contributed



mysterious research establishment in the Arizona desert whose purpose was murky but seemed to involve the paranormal and the disappearance of orphaned children. Zeiger questioned Held, who refused to divulge what he'd learned in the US, and watched as he was tortured and beaten before being placed in a mental institution. Prior to his arrest and while under surveillance Held had been moved to the apartment next to Zeiger's and the two had become friends. At least, that's how Held saw it.

The other landmark in his long service was authorship of a manual called *The Standardisation of Demoralization Procedures*, a handbook of terror, a step-by-step guide to the total mental disintegration of suspects accused of acting against the interests of the state. Everyone in the Stasi knew about it, most could quote from it, nearly all had utilised the techniques and theories contained in its pages. It was, in Stasi terms, a masterpiece.

When the novel opens in November 1989, on the day before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Zeiger is living alone and in poor health, suffering nosebleeds, seizures and blackouts, and has become preoccupied with Lara, a young waitress

at the café near the office who serves him his coffee and cheese toastie. Lara hasn't been at work for the previous month and he is beginning to wonder where she is.

Hofmann, an Austrian-American based in Berlin, constructs a convincing portrait of life in East Germany, its sights, sounds and even smells. When Zeiger makes coffee in his apartment that morning, "this was not coffee. It was coffee, pea flour and disgrace. This was Kaffee Mix and tasted like a nosebleed".

He watches a pre-dawn queue already forming at the bakery opposite his apartment. "Limited food and people trusting strangers with the naked planes of their backs. The pinnacle of human evolution."

What Hofmann does particularly well is to evoke the banality of authoritarianism. State terror can only thrive on the depth of its bureaucracy and the DDR's was chasmic. When Zeiger finished his masterwork, "it took weeks to register, validate and archive the completion of the Manual. There were forms to fill out, which required other forms to acquire, which, in turn, nobody knew how to obtain".

When he goes to place a copy in the archive – it's assigned to the literary

BOOKS EUROFILE



fiction department, to his bemusement – he finds “dense, windowless rooms, populated by haggard comrades who gave the impression of having lived there since they were born. Keepers of records and posthumous fate comprised a very particular species, one bred to survive without sunlight or rest”.

Hofmann also succeeds in twisting our expectations and assumptions. Weeks earlier Zeiger had been in the café when Lara placed a hand on his shoulder, accidentally as it turns out, but he takes this as tacit permission to turn up at her apartment bearing an assortment of odd gifts. We learn he’s been spying on her for quite a while already, observing her comings and goings from the shadows.

Boundaries clearly don’t concern Bernd Zeiger. He’s creepy for a living, surveillance has become second nature, meaning that even what appears to be a lonely man reading non-existent meanings into gestures and behaviour becomes a sinister opportunity to cross acceptable lines of behaviour emphatically and with impunity.

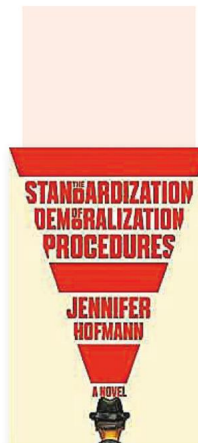
In the hands of a less-skilled author this would have been the extent of Zeiger’s character, but of course there is more to him than that. The more we learn

about the Stasi agent the more nuanced he becomes, a little bit like Stasi officer Wiesler in the 2006 film *The Lives of Others*.

We develop surprising sympathies for a man who on that first morning – the last to dawn on the GDR – is even intending to report his blind neighbour for listening to a western radio station he can make out through the wall.

“It occurred to him that although he had once been a child and there had been a childhood, it was amorphous and blank, an emptiness designed to torture by vanishing,” Hofmann writes, detailing a family background scarred by war that would not have been untypical for a man of Zeiger’s generation but which goes some way to explaining his willing absorption into a state surveillance machine.

Zeiger’s progress through the last full day of the GDR is particularly notable for how he fails to notice it’s happening. As his country and the ideology that built it crumbles Zeiger, the master of surveillance steeped in professional paranoia, remains oblivious. Granted he has other matters on his mind, the beautifully-executed plot twists and turns that link the Stasi man, the café



FIVE GREAT BOOKS OUT THIS WEEK

TRAVELLERS
Helon Habila
(Penguin, £8.99)

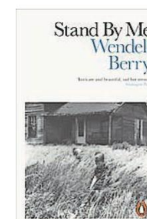
From a Berlin nightclub to a Sicilian refugee camp, Habila’s novel charts a range of modern European migrant experiences. A Nigerian-American couple on a prestigious arts fellowship, a transgender film student seeking the freedom of authenticity and a Libyan doctor who lost his wife and child in the waters of the Mediterranean, these are the European lives we don’t all see.


MADELEINE
Euan Cameron
(MacLehose Press, £9.99)

Will knows little of his family history until a chance encounter with a French cousin leads him to his grandmother Madeleine, shut away in a quiet Breton manor with her memories and secrets concerning Will’s long-lost grandfather. A cache of old letters leads him back to Vichy France and the possibility that some secrets are best left undisturbed. “Immersive, nuanced and impeccably researched,” says Ian Rankin.


STAND BY ME
Wendell Berry
(Penguin, £9.99)

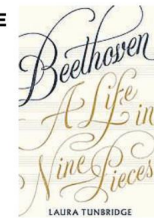
A collection of short stories all centred around the Kentucky river valley farming community of Port William. Beginning in 1888 when a



young woman risks her life to save a stranger from a drunken mob the stories pass along four generations, farmers wooing schoolteachers and soldiers returning from war, the Great Depression and Vietnam, feuds and friendship, grief and betrayal.

BEETHOVEN: A LIFE IN NINE PIECES
Laura Tunbridge
(Viking, £16.99)

We’re flooded with Beethoven this year as the world rushes to mark the 250th anniversary of his birth. Oxford scholar Laura Tunbridge takes an original view on the composer in this biographical documentary seen through nine of his works, each focusing on a different aspect or period of Beethoven’s life. The composer needed a fresh approach to criticism and biography and Tunbridge has risen to the challenge.


BURNT SUGAR
Avni Doshi (Hamish Hamilton, £14.99)

Drawing comparisons to Jenny Offill and Deborah Levy, Doshi’s novel tells the story of Tara who fled a loveless marriage to join an ashram and spent years chasing after a homeless artist with her young child in tow, and her difficult relationship with her daughter now that she’s growing older and showing signs of dementia. A thought-provoking novel that examines the bonds and responsibilities of family.



waitress and the physicist, but it’s still extraordinary to experience one of the great historical moments of the 20th century as burbling away quietly in the background unnoticed by the man at the heart of the story. Zeiger was supposed to be at the press conference that evening where government spokesman Günter Schabowski announced the immediate suspension of travel restrictions between East and West Germany, triggering the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Hofmann’s East Berlin is brilliantly depicted, like a lighter-touch *le Carré*, and the more magical elements of the story are reminiscent of *Spaceman of Bohemia*, Jaroslav Kalfar’s terrific novel about a Czech space mission (it’s notable that Kalfar provides a cover endorsement). *The Standardisation of Demoralisation Procedures* is a compelling debut, striking a perfect balance between humour and the horrors of life under a totalitarian regime even as it crumbles. It’s a novel of secrets, betrayals and how the past lurks permanently in the present.

In Leipzig, in the part of the Runde Ecke that isn’t taken up by the museum, the Stasi’s meticulously kept records are available to view. People can read their

own surveillance files, in some cases a day-to-day account of their activities, the places they went, the people they met, even transcripts of long-forgotten conversations decades old.

They can see photographs of themselves, capturing moments when they thought they were alone, the realisation that personal intimacy, daydreams, reflections, were the property of the most advanced and embedded surveillance state in the world.

As we drove away from the Runde Ecke I asked Tomas if he’d read his own file.

“No,” he replied, “and I never will. I never want to know which of my friends were informing on me.”

Hofmann’s novel distils beautifully much of what millions of Tomases went through during an era where any kind of free will or even basic hope must have seemed pointless.

“Numbing yourself makes some people fearless,” says Dr Witzbold, the ennuiriddled psychiatrist assigned to Johannes Held. “Others it turns into murderers.”

■ *The Standardisation of Demoralisation Procedures* by Jennifer Hofmann is published on August 11 by Riverrun, price £16.99

EUROFILE POEM AND PUZZLES

a poem for europe



LINDA JOHNS is an ex-teacher, writing poetry in East Anglia. The proximity of U.S. airbases and the North Sea are recurring themes.

COLD WEST WIND IN A TIME OF PLAGUE

Sitting in a golden garden, aware of my own privilege...
The indescribable scent of Skimmia wafts gently towards my sleeping dog;
Brave, nodding heads of Hellebore stand up for their rights,
But the cold west wind is drying them, desiccating leaves.

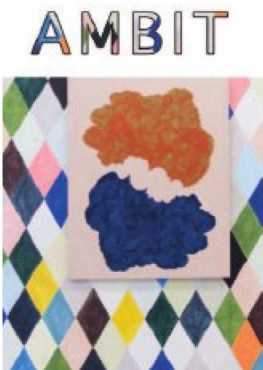
Millions now sweat behind closed doors, fearful and frustrated;
Guilt swamps me; wishing I could share my rural garden with those...
'Isolated' now a word in such abandoned use it sickens me.
Those who sweat most are those in charge.

For us, who are nearest to the Zuider Zee, it feels like mother's milk
To flee to France, Denmark, German rivers, Florence art.
The West Wind used to subtly burnish
Moors and hillsides, fens and pebbled beaches...

Now, the wind bears memories: those big winged cars,
Bourbon Whisky, Popeye, beads for natives;
Patronising arm of U.S. mastery, too big for Little Britain.
We learned to turn the other way; look the other way.

Now, a lonely island shivers, friendless and subdued.
Structures crumble, like the joists of burning buildings.
Europe's face is blank with shock, and sore;
And the West Wind is colder now.

A poem for Europe is edited by Briony Bax, Poetry Editor.
Submit your poems to poetryeditor@theneweuropean.co.uk



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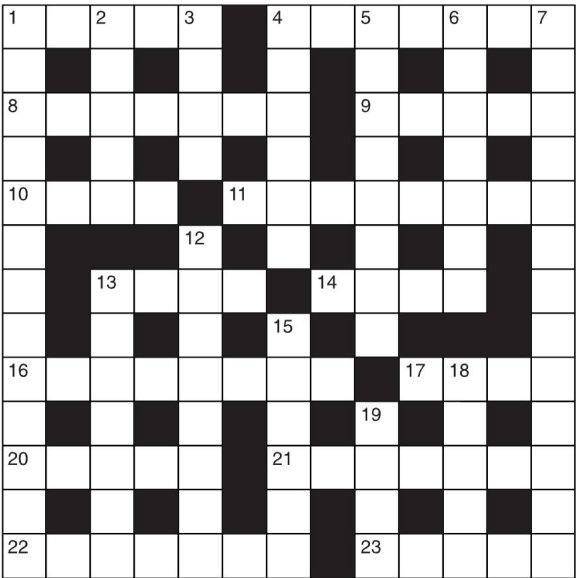
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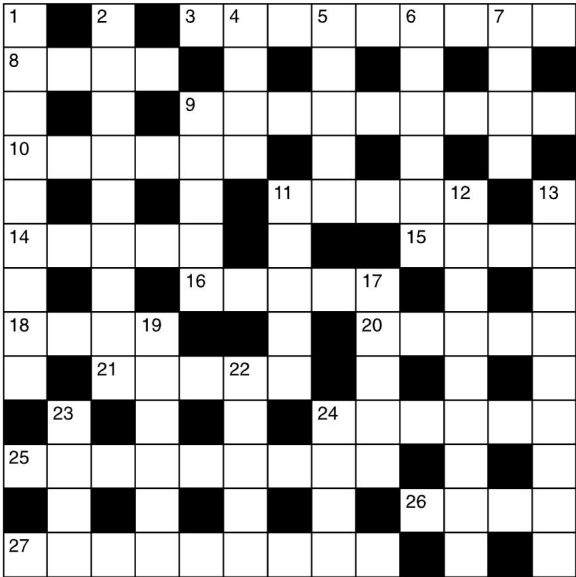
Cryptic 1

- Across
1. The sword of 2 (5)
4. Dried fruit makes dog ravel (7)
8. Care to hold receptacle holding gun? (7)
9. Jingle written by 150 using writing fluid (5)
10. Curious poker? (4)
11. Dislike of one rendering (8)
13. Turn for a breath of air (4)
14. Extremely true (4)
16. A let-out for the pilot in a jam? (8)
17. Cricket clubs (4)
20. The White House, naturally? (5)
21. Hut gone - it will make things harder (7)
22. Art involving shells, perhaps (7)
23. Not-so-young tree (5)
- Down
1. The supporter is assisting with more food (6,7)
2. Strips animals, say (5)
3. The team go in and in France go out (4)
4. A number go away but are closely attached (6)
5. Kind of flute only heard on playback? (8)
6. The dryness of air moving with tidy changes (7)
7. Captured nine porkers at reformatory (5,8)
12. Put in a seat for a sovereign (8)
13. Fleecy little Dickensian gets up to court (7)
15. Plainly without sparkle? (6)
18. Going back, father concealed insect pest (5)
19. Certain of treasured memories (4)



Cryptic 2

- Across
3. The underlying reason is to share out the beer (9)
8. A very tiny part of the anatomy (4)
9. Teacher's answer to all brain locks? (6,3)
10. Song for a worker on edge (6)
11. No easy time in court (5)
14. To speechify means nothing to a tearabout (5)
15. The colour of a stretch of water (4)
16. Dance when graduate takes to drink (5)
18. Observe return of Eastern heavyweight (4)
20. Fancy nice women including a man-hater! (5)
21. Former stage turn was quite precise (5)
24. Have relevance to wild animal appearing (4,2)
25. Made progress in the film industry? (9)
26. Perhaps rues being a consumer (4)
27. He expresses his objections, but is in favour of examiner (9)
- Down
1. Quantity is under par, but still supreme (9)
2. How express letters are delivered? (9)
4. The first man to cause a lady to lose her head (4)
5. Bury, but pause when before the mission (5)
6. There's nothing unusual about Marlon (6)
7. Doesn't get up and doesn't tell the truth (4)
9. Part of some terrible measure (5)
11. Entice from vast empty spaces (5)
12. Washerwoman makes the French take their clothes off (9)
13. Hired soldier is gleeful about broken cane (9)
17. Understudy got his chances? (5)
19. Formerly saucy, but now highly skilled (6)
22. Does it put the voter out of humour? (5)
23. Look at one's equal (4)
24. Venerable historian puts egghead on mattress (4)



Crossword solutions

Cryptic 1

Across: 1 Sabre; 4 Currant; 8 Carbine; 9 Clink; 10 Nose; 11 Aversion; 13 Wind; 14 Very; 16 Loophole; 17 Bats; 20 Igloo; 21 Toughen; 22 Gummy; 23 Elder; 25 Exit; 4 Cleave; 5 Recorder; 6 Aridity; 7 Taken prisoner; 12 Enthroned; 13 Woolen; 15 Flaky; 18 Aphid; 19 Sure.

Cryptic 2

Across: 3 Rationale; 8 Atom; 9 Master key; 10 Anthem; 11 Trail; 14 Orate; 15 Lake; 16 Rumba; 18 Note; 20 Cynic; 21 Exact; 24 Bear on; 25 Developed; 26 User; 27 Protester; Down: 1 Paramount; 2 Posthaste; 4 Adam; 5 Inter; 6 Normal; 7 Lies; 9 Meter; 11 Tempt; 12 Landress; 13 Mercenary; 17 Acted; 19 Expert; 22 Cross; 23 Peer; 24 Bede.

Sudoku solutions

Medium 1

3	4	7	6	8	1	2	9	5
9	6	5	7	2	4	8	1	3
8	2	1	3	9	5	6	7	4
6	8	9	4	3	7	1	5	2
7	1	2	9	5	6	3	4	8
5	3	4	8	1	2	7	6	9
2	9	6	5	7	8	4	3	1
1	7	3	2	4	9	6	8	5
5	2	8	9	6	7	3	4	1

Medium 2

8	7	2	4	1	6	9	3	5
6	4	1	3	9	5	8	2	7
3	9	5	7	2	8	1	6	4
4	8	3	6	7	2	5	1	9
9	1	6	8	5	4	2	7	3
2	5	7	1	3	9	4	8	6
7	3	4	5	8	1	6	9	2
1	6	9	2	4	3	7	5	8
5	2	8	9	6	7	3	4	1

Hard 2

2	3	4	8	9	5	7	1	6
7	1	6	2	3	4	5	8	9
8	5	9	6	7	1	4	2	3
9	4	8	3	1	2	6	5	7
3	2	7	9	5	6	8	4	1
1	6	5	4	8	7	9	3	2
6	7	1	5	2	8	3	9	4
4	6	3	1	6	9	2	7	5
5	9	2	7	4	3	1	6	8

Numberfit solutions

1

2	2	4	4	5	1	5	4	2
3	9	4	1	4	1	2	5	2
4	2	3	1	1	4	1	5	2
5	3	5	5	5	2	5	9	2
1	5	4	3	4	4	3	1	2
4	5	5	2	1	3	4	1	5
5	1	5	2	1	3	4	1	5
3	3	4	1	4	5	5	4	3

2

1	8	3	6	8	9	8	9	8
3	4	1	0	4	9	2	4	9
9	4	1	3	9	5	9	2	4
8	9	3	4	3	4	9	2	4
2	2	4	8	3	4	4	9	2
4	8	3	2	4	4	8	4	4
8	3	2	4	4	8	4	4	4
3	3	4	6	9	3	8	3	8

Sudoku – medium 1

	4	7				2	9	
9			7		4			3
8				9				4
	8		4		7		5	
		2				3		
	3		8		2		6	
4				6				7
2			5		8			1
	7	3				5	8	

Sudoku – medium 2

			4		6			
		1	3		5	8		
	9	5				1	6	
4	8			7			1	9
			8		4			
2	5			3			8	6
	3	4				6	9	
		9	2		3	7		
			9	7				

Sudoku – hard 1

9				7	1			
					9	7	2	
				4		9	5	
			4				8	5
8		4				2		9
3	2				7			
	3	6		2				
	8	5	9					
			7	3				2

Sudoku – hard 2

		4		9	5			
					4	5	8	
8		9					2	
			3				5	7
3								1
1	6			7				
	7					3		4
	8	3	1					
			7	4		1		

Numberfit

Fit the listed numbers into each grid.

Numberfit 1

2 digits: 22 – 39 – 55 – 95
3 digits: 115 – 144 – 155 – 292 – 414 – 441 – 494 – 521 – 525 – 551
4 digits: 4224 – 4424 – 5115 – 5543
5 digits: 15433 – 33451
7 digits: 1521344 – 4231141
9 digits: 224451542 – 225541453 – 234451543 – 334145543

Numberfit 2

2 digits: 18 – 38 – 48 – 91
3 digits: 324 – 343 – 424 – 433 – 484 – 494 – 841 – 941
4 digits: 2948 – 3449 – 3492 – 3499 – 3943 – 4049 – 4192 – 8934
5 digits: 36898 – 54469
6 digits: 224834 – 348236 – 395924 – 692534
8 digits: 39982845 – 89942845

BAWDINESS OF THE BARD

PETER TRUDGILL on the sometimes rather rude origins of surnames



Some family names, in spite of having been passed down across the generations for the last 500 years or more, still retain a form which makes it easy to see what they originally meant. In an earlier column, we already noted colour-based names like *Browne* and *White*. Particularly interesting, though, are names which read like mini-sentences.

One such name consists of a verb plus an adverb: *Golightly*. This is not just an invention of Truman Capote's for his character Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, the part played by Audrey Hepburn in the film derived from the book.

It is also a perfectly real family name that would originally have meant something like 'walk nimbly'. The *Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* shows that there were more than 900 people bearing that surname in the most recent UK census.

We also find quite a number of sentence-like surnames which are formed from a verb plus a noun. *Hornblower* is another real name, not just a fictional one thought up by C.S. Forester for his Napoleonic Wars naval captain Horatio Hornblower.

The name was applied to someone who blew a horn – that is, the town or village watchman who was charged with signalling an emergency or the beginning and end of a curfew.

Another surname with this kind of structure is *Drinkwater*, which would probably have been given as a nickname to a person who preferred to drink water rather than small beer, the weak ale that was the beverage of preference for many people in the Middle Ages when water was often contaminated – fermented drinks provided some degree of protection against infection.

It could perhaps also have been used ironically of a drunkard. There is a similar French-language name, presumably awarded to individuals for the same reasons, *Boileau*.

An English-language name of the same type is *Gotobed*. It is perhaps hard to believe, but true, that this originally meant exactly what it says – it was a nickname given to someone who, one supposes, went to bed frequently or perhaps very early, though there is no indication as to what reason or purpose sent them to their bed so often.

There is nothing mysterious, either, about the surname *Dolittle* or *Doolittle*, which appears to have genuinely been a label given as a nickname to lazy people who were not actually inclined to do very much.

And *Makepeace* really was the name for an arbitrator or peacemaker; though it could also very likely have been used ironically of someone who raised hell and created disturbances.

Quite a large number of occupational nicknames have the same verb-plus-noun structure as *Makepeace*. A *Mr Leadbetter* or *Leadbeater* would have been someone who worked with lead and would, from time to time, have to pound it into shape.

My own surname is an East Anglian dialect form of *Threadgold*, which was a nickname for someone who "threaded gold" – in other words, an embroiderer who sewed fine robes and surplices for the clergy.



The name *Wagstaff* also looks as if it ought to refer to someone who wagged a staff, and it probably was used initially for a beadle. *Wagstaff* is not totally dissimilar in form and meaning to the name *Shakespeare*.

And *Shakespeare* did also certainly mean what it said. It was possibly first used for a man who was a military spear-carrier, but it is equally possible that it was a

nickname for someone who was belligerent or quick to arm himself.

It is also conceivable that, like *Wagstaff*, it had some kind of obscene significance.

This is not the place to enter into an extended discussion of that possibility, but the fact is that the name of our revered Bard might well have had a bawdy meaning applied, not of course to the good William himself, but to some licentious male ancestor.

SURNAME

The word *surname* originally meant 'additional name', signifying a name which was bestowed on someone over and above their personal name. The prefix *sur-* comes from French *sur*, 'over', from Latin *super*. The prefix appears with the same meaning in other English words like *surcharge*, *surpass*, *surcoat*, *surface*, *surfeit*, *surmount*, *survive* – and *surplice*.

STAR NAME: Audrey Hepburn during filming for her role as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast At Tiffany's* (1961)

Photo: Getty Images

EUROFILE GREAT LIVES

BRILLIANT: Portrait of
Maria Szymanowska,
1816. Found in the
Collection of Biblioteka
Narodowa, Warszawa
Photo: Getty Images



GREAT EUROPEAN LIVES

BY CHARLIE CONNELLY

#157 MARIA SZYMANOWSKA

DECEMBER 14, 1789 – JULY 25, 1831

The summer of 1831 brought cholera to St Petersburg. It was in the Neva and the canals, it was in the wells and the culverts. The first cases were reported in early June and within days the daily death rate was in three figures. The epidemic would go on to kill nearly 6,500 people in the city.

Three weeks after quarantine laws were introduced and cordons thrown around the most virulently-affected areas riots broke out and physicians were attacked, the result of rumours they were spreading the disease deliberately in poorer areas. A German surgeon was murdered and a hospital was burned to the ground. The bacterium didn't care, it kept spreading and kept killing, respecting neither age nor status.

It was weeks before the news reached western Europe, just ahead of the spread of the disease itself, and while the death of Archduke Constantin, the son of the Tsar, was mentioned, it was the name of another victim that led the reports.

"We are much pained to announce the death of Madame Szymanowska, an amiable lady and accomplished pianoforte player, who has fallen one of the victims of the cholera in St Petersburg," intoned the *London Atlas* in October. "If this be the class of artist which the cholera selects, woe be to music, for it will single out her choicest ornaments."

A pioneering concert pianist and highly-regarded composer who was a direct influence on Chopin, Maria Szymanowska captivated audiences across Europe during her relatively brief career as a performer, among whom was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who credited Szymanowska with "a genius akin to madness". He even dedicated one of his last poems, *Aussöhnung*, to her in 1823, writing, "And so your heart is comforted and knows it is alive, and beating, and will keep beating in gratitude for a gift so undeserved, eager to give itself up, to make return. Now you feel – if only it would last! – the double joy of music and of love".

Szymanowska is little known today but as well as being a brilliant pianist and composer of more than 100 published works she blazed a trail for women performers and composers as well as for virtuosos of all genders. She was one of the first instrumentalists to give concerts in the form we know them today and is believed to have been the first to perform pieces from memory, something with which Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann were later credited. Audiences in Poland in 1823 were astonished when she performed her own *Caprice sur la Romance de Joconde* from memory when the piece hadn't even been committed to paper, let alone published.

It's clear from what contemporary records remain that Szymanowska was a captivating concert pianist.

"She performed two pieces by Hummel in her most spirited manner," gushed one review of a recital in London in 1825, "throwing into her execution all the varieties of light and shade, melancholy and fire, which renders her style so pleasing."

"She swept the keys in the most difficult passages with the rapidity of light," enthused another, "science and delicacy equally distinguished her performance, which closed to the loudest applause."

Szymanowska's success was extraordinary on many levels. The idea of a performance virtuoso was a new one, let alone a woman pioneering the role. Add to that Szymanowska being, at the peak of her powers, a single parent to three children whose ex-husband was notably reticent in providing financial support and her success takes on extra dimensions.

Divorce was rare in the early 19th century but in 1820 her marriage to Jozef Szymanowski ended at his behest. A gentleman farmer, Szymanowski thoroughly disapproved of his wife's desire for a career and the rare level of independence that went with it. His was a world of cattle and harvests; to him salons and pianos were trifles and fripperies, especially for the wife of a gentleman.

Szymanowska stood firm, however, and established herself at the expense of her marriage. While Szymanowski reluctantly agreed to support his three young children financially it didn't last long, and it wasn't long before Szymanowska was the sole breadwinner for her young family.

Born in Warsaw to a successful brewer and a mother descended from Polish nobility, Maria amazed her parents from an early age with an extraordinary ability to improvise on the keyboard. The family home was already a cultural hub, attracting poets, writers, artists and musicians to evening salons, all of whom were astounded when the young girl swinging her legs from the piano stool began pulling off complex inversions, inventions and improvisations.

Tutors came and went – women were barred from attending music schools at the time – and all expressed amazement at the girl's sheer ability, including Jozef Elsner who would go on to be Chopin's first piano teacher.

Having established a reputation in her home city, in 1810, the year of her marriage, Szymanowska began to widen her performance horizons. She travelled to Paris to play at some of the city's leading concert salons in Paris, creating such an impression that Luigi Cherubini, one of

the leading composers of the day, went straight home and wrote his *Fantasy for Piano* in her honour.

Bearing three children in the space of two years, a daughter in 1811 and twins, a son and a daughter, the following year, paused her career momentum as a performer, but Szymanowska turned to composition instead, producing some complex virtuosic pieces for the piano in particular. Robert Schumann was among those who praised her *Twenty Exercises and Preludes for Piano*.

Szymanowska's return to performance ended her marriage, and for much of the 1820s she was on the road almost constantly, touring the concert halls of Europe and earning rapturous reviews. St Petersburg brought her the acquaintance of leading composers of the day such as Johann Hummel and John Field while Tsar Alexander I was so impressed he appointed Szymanowska to the post of First Pianist to his daughters.

From Vilnius to Milan she travelled the continent relentlessly, making a triumphant return to Warsaw in early 1827, selling out the National Theatre on two occasions, an audience that included a young and starstruck Frederic Chopin. Szymanowska became one of Chopin's greatest advocates, providing support and, importantly, advice to the young composer. When in the late 1820s Chopin travelled to Paris for instruction by the once great but increasingly bitter Friedrich Kalkbrenner, for example, Szymanowska warned Chopin that Kalkbrenner was "a scoundrel", intent on "cramping your genius".

She developed an impressive social circle that included Pushkin, Paganini, Salieri, Meyerbeer, Weber, Goethe, the poet Adam Mickiewicz who went on to marry her daughter Celina, Beethoven, Glinka and Rossini, all of whom were recorded in the scrapbooks she kept containing letters, signatures, personal messages and drawings by some of the biggest names of the Romantic movement.

Her appointment to the Russian imperial court brought Szymanowska much-needed financial security, meaning she could scale down her exhausting touring schedule. She settled in the Russian capital, publishing new works that were distributed across Europe, giving piano lessons to the children of the nobility and still filling concert halls with occasional recitals. The regular salons she hosted drew the city's leading composers, writers and artists, and any major cultural names visiting St Petersburg made leaving their calling card at Szymanowska's residence their first duty on arriving in the city.

She was just 42 when cholera struck, the spread of the disease across Europe and the relative remoteness of St Petersburg from other major European capitals meaning her death was not marked as widely as it could have been. Her posthumous reputation dimmed accordingly, but her presence can be heard in Chopin's piano works and seen in the subsequent rise of the composer-virtuosi, from Liszt to Clara Schumann.

Goethe had met Szymanowska in Marienbad in 1823. Many scholars believe he fell deeply in love with her; certainly he left one of the most eloquent descriptions of a pioneering woman who blazed a trail through the concert halls and salons of early 19th century Europe. "Inspired by her," he wrote in a letter to a friend, "both court and town live on in an atmosphere of music and joy."

WILL SELF

A young friend who has the acute misfortune to be an impresario sends me a link to a piece on the *Spectator* website about 'guerrilla' plays. Not to be outflanked by drug-fuelled ravers during the lockdowns, sedate playgoers are also being drawn into a crepuscular realm of secret rendezvous, blindfolded mystery tours and clandestine performances. Round my way the police seem mostly taken up, still, with their time-honoured shtick called Stop-and-Search on the Basis of Racial Profiling, but who knows – maybe they'll crack down on these illegal theatrics, on the basis that their casting (unlike the Met's) is too colour-blind.

And that would be a mistake – because the last time I looked British theatre audiences were still, for the most part, as white as the driven. Indeed, much of what's always put me off theatre as an art form is precisely this: the audience are usually far better performers than those ostensibly treading the boards. And why wouldn't they be, given they are for the most part typecast: well-educated middle class white people, playing the part of well-educated middle class white people. Whereas the poor puppets up there treading the boards are usually woefully miscast. How many times have I wanted to cry out to this Troilus or that Cressida: "You aren't Trojan nobles! You're well-educated middle class white people pretending!"

I'm by no means as bad as Martin Amis, who once confided to me that he regarded Shakespeare's having been a dramatist at all as a sort of cosmic solecism – but that being noted, as the years have passed I've found it increasingly difficult to sit through plays at all, so unable am I to suspend disbelief in what's happening on the stage, as opposed to in the stalls. Indeed, the last theatrical performances I enjoyed at all were ones where the audience did indeed take on the principal role. A West End production of Beckett's *Endgame*, starring Michael Gambon as Hamm and Lee Evans as Clov, attracted an audience on the basis of the latter's fame as a rubberneck comic turn. To begin with they roared with laughter as Evans silly-walked about the stage (and the playwright himself had wanted a physical comedian for the part); but as the piece's intense ambience of alienation began to take hold their merriment stuttered to a halt – if it wasn't a one-act play, I suspect many would've quit the theatre in the interval.

And then there was production of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* I went to the day after the July 7, 2005 terrorist bombings in London. My then wife was an avid theatre goer, and she was damned if she was going to miss out – so we walked into the West End against the flow of commuters, who, with the underground shut and the buses not running, were promenading home.

Ibsen's play does indeed feature the proverbial pistol in the first act – the one which Chekov, contemporaneously asserted, should not be there at the outset of the play, unless it's going to be fired. As it was, with the house virtually deserted, I kept darting looks around the darkened



Multicultural Man .. on theatre's curtain call?



ALIENATION: Lee Evans, left, and Michael Gambon in *Endgame* at London's Albery Theatre, 2004
Photo: Getty Images

auditorium – and noticed that the few playgoers present were doing the same.

It was clear that far from being transported to *fin de siècle* Norway, we were all wondering whether besides the proverbial pistol on the table onstage, there was also a backpack full of explosives in the dress circle, primed to go off before the curtain finally fell. Then, during the interval, we went for a drink in the crush bar – and standing on the balcony outside sipping them, we had a superb view down St Martin's Lane to a void Trafalgar Square, over which hung a huge, orange sun – which may've been a pathetic fallacy, but was also the minatory truth.

Why? Well, Montaigne said: Mistrust a man who takes games too seriously, it means he doesn't take life seriously enough – and by the same token, we should worry about a culture that suspends disbelief too readily in amusing plays, since it probably means we can't apprehend the very seriousness of the reality we're caught up in. The pandemic has returned us to that reality: one in which life is precarious and the future uncertain. Under such circumstances even Lee Evans's fans might experience his gyrations as evidence of the Beckettian meaninglessness of our own go-round. While as for Troilus and Cressida, some critics have said of this – one of Shakespeare's so-called 'problem plays' – that it's a sort of 'meta-tragedy': a peculiarly modern piece, that foregrounds the impossibility, in our own era, of us experiencing true tragedy; if for this, is required a full apprehension of the inexorability of our fates.

If so, come the autumn, and with British theatres still shut, I suspect it won't be appearing in any guerrilla impresario's repertoire – for by then the full impact of what is indisputably a real tragedy will be begun to be felt and all of our performances – whether onstage or off – will be manifesting far, far greater authenticity.

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